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I FOUND AFRICA



Van Nes Allen

I FOUND AFRICA

By VAN NES ALLEN

ILLUSTRATED



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Chapter I

It hung like a cloud far off on the distant horizon, and was hazy in the gray mist that rose from the sea to envelop it. I stood alone on the deck trembling with excitement. I had been there for hours, it seemed, my eyes searching the silent miles of ocean beyond the ship's prow. Then the sun reached up, slowly, like a glowing ball of orange fire, and the veil grew thin. Lightly the cloud rose and the mist seemed to sink lazily back into the sea. The grey took on a brighter hue and finally, as though it still would hold its secret from me, disappeared entirely. In its place a mountain stood all green and fresh and lovely in the dawn. Sparkling like the water beneath her, Africa lay before us in the sunrise.

Though we were still miles from shore and in all the mass of foliage on the mountaintop only a single tree stood out from the rest distinguishing itself as a tree, I felt sure that in this one I could see monkeys skipping about in the branches and swinging merrily from vine to vine. On the shore, too, I saw deer. There could be no doubt of it, for this was Africa, and Africa meant wild animals. It was truly the land I had dreamed of! I ran quickly to the cabin for field glasses. My disappointment was great as I looked through them to find that, though the tree was beautiful, it held no monkeys. As for the beach, I couldn't

even see it. The surf that pounded in on the shore threw up a spray so high that only at rare intervals could the sand be seen at all.

Then I swung the glasses down from the mountain toward the bay that slipped away behind it. Across the opening a bar stretched out before us for a mile or more and glistened in the sun. Upon this sparkling barrier the waves incessantly pounded as though to frighten away intruders from the shores which it protected.

At first there seemed to be no passage through, but as our boat came nearer I made out, at the very tip point of the sand, a little opening where the waves shot into the bay and up on the beach beyond. Here the surf was terrific. Bounding about in confused fashion and bumping into each other in their hurry to reach the shore, the great irregular rollers shot clouds of foamy spray into the air above them. As I stood, wondering how we should ever pass through such a sea as this, our whistle blew. Three long deafening blasts roared out in angry challenge to the forbidding water before us. They were answered by three softened echoes from the mountain rising above, now only a few miles off. A bell on the bridge rang and the engine slowed down to half speed.

I looked again at the surf and was startled to see, between it and our steamer, two little boats, their oars rising and falling evenly on the rough water as they came toward us. While I watched, a third appeared on the white foam behind them, hovered for a moment on the crest of an incoming wave and then sank out of sight. The following roller fairly lifted it out of the water; as its bow came down, the spray flew up and it was completely hidden again. A minute later it, too, was through and the three boats, one behind another, worked slowly toward us. I watched them anxiously for it was in one of these that I would make the last short lap of my journey.

The bell on the bridge rang again, and the motor slowed up even more. A sailor climbed out on a plank

running alongside the bow to take soundings. The third time he cast his weight the motor was cut entirely, and the anchor dropped. A grinding screech as the chain was pulled down, and then we lay calmly in the water, rolling gently from side to side.

I walked to the other side of the deck to get a better view of the three boats approaching us. They had looked tiny coming through the bar, but now, less than half a mile away, I could see that they were not nearly so small as I had thought at first. Sixteen shining black backs rose and fell as one, in the boat nearest us, and fourteen in each of the two following. Perched in the sterns, their cover cloths fluttering behind them in the breeze, were the three headmen; Apollos, sleek with oil, glossy black and proud, they stood, one knee on the rail, heads tilted back and hands resting gracefully on the tiller.

There was shuffling on the deck below and I looked down. Sailors dashed about pulling the covers off hatches, hoisting cranes and fixing pulleys. As I watched—genuinely startled at seeing so much life about me, for I, somehow, had felt that I was alone—the motor of the winch started, and from then on all was noise and confusion.

The clanking and bustle seemed out of keeping with the natural sounds around us, and I looked again toward the surfboats. All three were close now, and the first one was coming alongside. It looked like an overgrown rowboat—forty feet of heavy seaworthy timber bobbing about in the water beside us. In the bow stood three customs men beside the Liberian flag, made of red and white stripes with one large white star on a blue field in the upper corner on the staff side, patterned after the flag of the United States, just as the Liberian government has the same form and institutions as ours.

At a signal from the headman the pullers lifted their oars from the loose locks and laid them on the planks which served as seats. Immediately several men jumped up, poised themselves gracefully on the gun-

wales of the restless boat, and caught hold of the ropes that were thrown down to them from the deck above. A moment later, as the other two boats came in, a ladder was lowered and the customs officials climbed aboard.

While passports were being examined in the captain's cabin, the sailors were busy below sorting the loads. In each group eight or more crates and trunks were belted together with a heavy chain. At the top of each a hook was fastened and, one by one, the winch hoisted them up and lowered them into the waiting surfboats.

It was fascinating to watch. With a jerk these clumsy burdens would groan and leave the deck, then, swinging unsteadily back and forth, they would climb until high in the air, directly above the place where I was standing. Here, suspended by a cable which looked frightfully small and flimsy, they would hang until the boat rolled into position so that they could be lowered. As they neared the water the boatmen looked for all the world like a nest of hungry blackbirds. Heads back, and arms out, each would wait, anxious to be the first to get his hands upon the boxes.

Kru men, these, the boat tribe of the west coast, laughing and grinning as they worked, their short sweating bodies bulging with muscle; their strange, soft-vowelled language rising and falling like the water around them. This back-breaking task of boat-loading was a sport to them, a game to be played and laughed over, though it's only a new man at surfboating who has no tales to tell of boxes that have slipped and chains that have broken, and bodies that have been crushed.

In a surprisingly short time the boats were loaded, the deck cleared, and the passports O.K.'d. Hands were shaken, goodbyes said, and down the unsteady ladder we went, literally into the arms of the waiting boatmen. At the bottom step each of us would pause as the surfboat came up on a wave, then jump

and find himself in half a dozen pairs of sweating muscular arms and hands. Over boxes and crates we climbed, steadying ourselves on woolly heads and smooth shoulders as we went along, until finally, with a little bump, our knees slightly weak, we were seated in the stern on a sheet of wet and salty canvas stretched over a heap of burlap sacks.

The boat looked ridiculously small now, and as I glanced up at the rolling grey sides of the stately monster above us I felt very much alone and helpless. The forty feet of seaworthy wood had dwindled in size to a mere chip, a chip that smelled of creosote and dried fish.

"*Womuta!* (Let us go!)" the headman's voice rang out, and the long clumsy oars were lifted and slipped into their oarlocks. A hollow metallic boom as the bow boy poled our nose clear of the steamer; and then, feet braced and a grin on the face of every puller, we struck out for shore, the two smaller boats following close behind.

Click—click—click—click, click—click—click—click, sixteen oars jangled about in their loose fittings and, sounding ever as one, pulled us toward the bar. The steamer had swung about and was making her way slowly out into the open sea. As we came alongside the outer ring of surf, it seemed impossible that we could ever pass through. I wasn't frightened—the picture was too splendid for that—but I was fascinated. The tremendous depth and power of the waves hypnotized me and I couldn't take my eyes off them. Like a sullen, choppy, rough-ploughed hill with mammoth furrows going in every direction, and changing each time a new roller came over it, the sea rose above us.

Directly ahead of us was the long sand bar, stretching out across the bay from one shore almost to the other, like a slim finger. Flowing at right angles to the finger, past its tip, between it and the other shore of the bay, was a narrow and shallow passage through which the surf roared murderously. And it was toward this passage that our boats turned.

Just outside the surf the men stopped rowing. The headman stood up straddling the rudder handle, and looked back at the incoming waves. He seemed to be counting them. Several hundred yards behind, a giant billow was arching out of the ocean and coming fast toward us, gaining size with each smaller wave it overtook. Quickly he called to the other two headmen, pointing to it as he did, then settled himself in the stern, watching the wave and gripping the rudder firmly in his hand. The boatmen sat calmly waiting, feet braced, oars up, their eyes always upon their leader. As it came in and started to lift us, he jumped up, swinging his arms and yelling frantically to his men: "*Wo-tah! Wo-tah, kai!*"

The words worked like magic. The quietly waiting pullers sprang into action, and as we went higher they dug their oars into the water, carrying the boat along the roller. Just as we were gaining speed, the wave started to break; our headman called again to his men, and, much to my horror, they began to backwater. Down we slipped off the crest and into the trough behind us. I thought we should never reach the bottom. When we did and started to rise again I thought we should never reach the top! My stomach almost turned over and I felt as though we had just dropped ten flights in an elevator, come to a sudden stop, and then shot up again; I couldn't see a thing but the sky zigzagging back and forth in a dizzy fashion with each wild pitch of the boat. The wave before us kept the land from view, and the wave coming in behind—which I thought would surely break over us—kept the ocean out. I had no idea where the other two boats were. They seemed to have been swallowed by the sea.

All this time the headman had been talking excitedly to the pullers before him and also calling out to the men who were beyond the wave that was lifting us. As we reached its crest, I saw and understood, for the first time, why we had stopped. Not fifty yards to our left were the two smaller boats. One was

turned completely about, and the other rolled helplessly in the waves sideways. The spray was breaking over them continuously and the boatmen seemed to have lost their heads. The effect that our helmsman had upon them was truly marvellous to see. As he called, talking and pleading with them, they dragged and pulled their oars until the boats were brought under control and carefully turned about facing the shore. Then came minutes of tense waiting that seemed hours, as the headman looked back watching for another wave to take us in.

The bar over which we had to go was very shallow, and consequently only the very large rollers could carry a heavily loaded surfboat through. All headmen know the trick of finding out just which waves are the big ones, and on this day, I was told later, it was every eleventh.

Finally, after what seemed an endless stretch of needless waiting, the right one came. If anything, it was more mountainlike than the last, and as it lifted us up I felt myself grow numb all over. Higher and higher we went and then suddenly, with a shout, the three headmen leaped forward. "*Womuta! Womuta! Wota! sa!*" Over and over they cried it and each time the men answered by digging harder and deeper into the roller-top. We seemed to be sliding at a terrifying speed down a watery gray hillside into a boiling pit the bottom of which we never quite could reach.

Then, suddenly, we were in smooth water. The bar was only a few feet behind us, and the surf was pounding down on the other side. We lay there quietly, the men panting and splashing water over their twitching bodies, and the headmen looking at one another and rubbing their eyes. At first nothing was said, then smiles broke and the oars clicked again. A chant—a soft Kru man's chant of the sea and the surf and the bar—rose from the three boats. They sang and laughed and their oars dipped smoothly, for a devil was behind them. A hungry devil who could not follow and who roared angrily as though he had been cheated

of something he had earned and deserved. The chant grew louder as slowly we moved down the bar.

Now the beach was before us, the beach with its front of awkward traders' stores built of brick, its ramshackle warehouses, and the homes of rich black men, made of corrugated iron in imitation of white men's termite-proof buildings, ugly, stilted, robbing the shore of its natural beauty.

But off on either side were natives' huts, little groups of them, mud-walled and roofed with thatch, seemingly pushed aside and glared down upon. Like tiny frightened birds, their brown heads ruffled, they clustered together for protection, lovely in the sun, and natural as the trees above them. The mountain reached up behind: cleared for a space and patched with houses, little gardens, and thickets of brush dotted by swaying palm trees; then a solid stretch of brush, cut by a steep winding path which led to the mission.

This was Cape Mount, Liberia, the end of one journey for me, the beginning of one far vaster than even my excited imagination could ever have foreseen.

Nestled on a small plateau halfway up the mountain I could see buildings, big substantial stone houses banded by bulging white piazzas, and, a quarter of a mile over to the left, the hospital. Clean, its white-washed brick shining in the bright light, it pointed behind toward another group of mission buildings. Rising above them all, a solid mass of dense green forest, soft and rolling, climbed ever up until, rounding off in the sky, it slipped away to lose itself in the blue.

A great gathering was on the beach to greet us. Proud Liberian officials, first, looking important in frock coats and top hats, but standing the heat very poorly. Ragged coast boys, slightly covered by dirty, torn singlets, scampered among them and splashed in the shallow water, letting us know, quite certainly, that they thought a steamer call a thing not to be taken lightly. Off to the side, again, like the huts in

which they lived, were the native men. Robed in flowing country gowns, they waited—dignified and quiet—while behind them, laughing and excitedly waving to those in our boat whom they recognized, were the mission boys and girls, come to meet us and to enjoy the excitement.

As we slid to a grinding stop in the sand twenty yards from shore the pullers climbed out into the water. A little Kru man, whom I had particularly noticed as we came through the bar, for he was the smallest in the boat and had pulled harder and sung louder than any of the others, waded over to the place where I sat in the stern his face hardly reaching above the gunwale. It was rippling with beady grins.

"Come, Massah, I take you for shore."

I was surprised as I heard, in the mouth of a Liberian native, the familiar Negro corruption of "Master" which has become traditional in America. Later, when I heard the lovelier "*Mahsahgie*," meaning chief, or king, I began to wonder whether the familiar "Massah" of slave days in America were not a shortening of that word rather than a corruption of our word "Master." Perhaps it is a bit of both.

I laughed, not knowing quite what else to do, and remained seated where I was.

"You no come with me? You no go for shore? I think you like shore better past boat when you know him. Come, I take you."

"Well, I really don't think you could. You see, I'm——"

He laughed, interrupting me.

"Ah, I see. You be tired too much. I know—you be sick!"

He stretched over the side and picked me up as though I were an empty suitcase—my belt being the handle. I felt most undignified, but clutched him round the neck and slowly we splashed along toward shore. When we were out of the water, I started to put my legs down, but he pulled them up and continued walking on till we were far up on the land.

We had come to a heap of fish-scaly sacks, and onto their none-too-sweet-smelling softness he gently lowered me, laughing as he did and pointing toward the passage through the bar a mile down the strand. Then he stood back and looked at me, turning his head from side to side and nodding approvingly as a group of his friends came up to join him. I felt very foolish—like some new attraction in a side show—and was about to get up and look for my friends when he came over grinning in a shyly confidential way. Suddenly his face became very serious and he looked me straight in the eye.

"You *dash* me *tawah*?"

"Yes—yes, surely, but I don't understand. I what?"

"*Tawah*—you give me?" He pointed to the cigarettes in my pocket.

"Oh, yes, surely." I handed him the pack. It was small payment for the two new, and highly important words he had taught me—"dash," "to give," or, as a noun, "gift," and "*tawah*," "tobacco." He held it for a moment, a broad smile on his face, then looked down at me questioningly.

"All? I keep all?"

He asked it as though I had given him a bag of gold. The "all" was spoken in a whisper, almost reverently. I nodded, and he turned to his friends laughing and waved the pack high above his head. They crowded round him excitedly and, much to my surprise, he tore the paper off and started dealing out his great *dash*, two at a time, into their eager, outstretched hands. Several others ran over and soon the pack was gone. He had saved two for himself and these he carefully put behind a rather wet ear. Then he strutted over to me again, followed by his silent watchers.

"*Isseh, Mahnjah!* Tank you. Tank you plenty too-much, chief!"

He grinned and turned proudly to his friends who were now busily puffing the cigarettes with which he had *dashed* them. Mr. Dickerson, the head of the



Vahnee with carbide hunting light

mission, with whom I had come to Liberia, was plucking at my sleeve to introduce me to Harvey Simmonds, his associate at the mission, and a man of whom I was to see much later. While the two men were attending to the formalities of landing, I turned again to watch the Kru men, and especially the one who had carried me in. I was fascinated by their childlike happiness and the soft-spoken words of their language. "*Isseh*," he had said. It had a lovely sound of gratitude.

Later I was to learn its many uses. I was to hear natives who had not seen each other for a long time punctuating their conversations for hours, upon meeting again, with "*Isseh! Isseh!*" Between long, detailed accounts of fishing, of elephant kills, of sickness or health, of famine and plenty, the oft-reiterated word, *Isseh*, which meant, in these cases, "I am so glad to see you again. Thank you for coming. Thank you for being here. Thank you for the warmth and friendliness of your being, and for all the time you are giving to talking with me."

And I was to hear it said in sadness after the death of a third or subsequent child, spoken in low-voiced sympathy and humility to a sorrowing mother, "*Isseh! Isseh!*" "Thank you for having borne this pain and this sorrow." It is never said to a woman if her first-born dies, or her second. But a woman who has lost three children is one who has given so nobly and fully to her people that there is only one word which will express their humility—"Isseh!"

My bearer was chatting freely and excitedly with his friends, and his talk seemed to please them, for with each chirping sentence, most of which I couldn't make out at all, they would nod, open-mouthed and wide-eyed with awe. He was king for the minute and missed no chance to show it. After a moment more of strutting he walked over close to me again; his retinue pressed in behind.

"You go show me big *Kamah* gun, now?"

I smiled blankly, for I had no idea what he meant. Quickly he picked up a long stick and, holding it out

as though it were a gun, aimed it at a skinny dog which, since our arrival, had been contentedly sniffing and scratching among the sacks beneath me. A loud wide-mouth boom followed and the boy dropped the stick, falling down on his hands and knees as he did so, where for some time he busied himself jumping round in an active and evidently wounded manner. The climax came when, after a particularly high bounce, he rolled over on his back, thrust his hands and feet into the air and, after a bloodcurdling squeal, quivered beautifully and slumped into limpness. The last part of his act was accompanied by shouts of joy and encouragement from his followers. When they felt he was sufficiently dead they picked him up and there followed a period of back-slapping and hand-shaking such as probably few state representatives have ever equalled. He tried his best to be nonchalant, but finally gave up, admitting with his grins that he, too, believed himself a pretty clever fellow. Then he pushed them aside saying, I suppose, the equivalent of "But you haven't seen anything yet," and made his way back to me.

"*Kamah*—el-phant. You go show me big gun?"

I had added another word to my vocabulary—*Kamah*, "elephant," also, as I learned later, when spoken with a different inflection, "How much?" or "How many?" perhaps indicating that the huge elephant has become a measure of all size or quantity.

He put out his hand and I shook it.

"Yes, surely. I think I ought to give it to you, but I haven't it here. How did you know I had one?"

"Oh, every man he know. I tell plenty man, plenty man he tell me. You go for bush and hunt plenty, I hear."

The "*Kamah* gun" was a .405 Winchester which I had bought for the special purpose of trying to shoot an elephant on this trip. I had written Harvey Simmonds about it, and its fame had preceded me.

It was my turn to straighten up and feel important. He stole my scene, though, for he seemed to be on the

verge of another one-act play when a voice from the boat brought him about with a start.

"Hey, you lazy Kru man! You come down here and work, or I come up and flog you good!"

He was silent for a moment, then—

"Damn!" The smiles were gone and the two cigarettes were brown and dripping with sweat. A frown ploughed his forehead, furrowing back into his kinky hair.

"Damn plenty times!"

He turned away from us and stamped back toward the boat for another load.

I left and wandered off through the crowd in search of my white friends. There was little trouble in finding them, for the masses moved toward the customs-house, and here, amid mission children, Liberian officials, countrymen and townfolk, they stood. Everyone was talking and everyone was shaking hands. Never, I think, have I seen so many smiling faces. I was rather out of it at first, feeling very much the stranger in Africa, but soon found myself standing with the rest shaking hands and being beamed upon like any old-time coaster back from a six months' furlough.

In the midst of the confusion a band started playing. I turned around and there, marching out from behind a splotchy galvanized-iron warehouse, beating and blowing every sort of instrument I had ever seen—and some I had never seen before—was a regiment of blue-shirted mission boys. They played loudly at a march which was vaguely familiar, and, I thought, improved by the occasional spasmodic peppering-ups they gave it. The finer points of mail-order-house brass horns may not have been known to them, but a vigorous volume of sound poured forth which, at a respectful distance, was a privilege, if not a pleasure, to hear.

Beside me stood Mr. Dickerson, smiling. He had made it possible for the boys to have this band and so, when he returned from far-off, mysterious America, they had come with the band to meet him. Now they

seized him and Harvey Simmonds and took them off to head a procession which was forming. But I hung back. I wanted to be among the natives.

And then we started to march. The band, with my white friends, started off . . . up the winding path, while the whole town fell in behind, dancing in a sort of "trucking" motion, and singing. I fell in at the tail end of the band. A woman who must have been at least eighty years old, dishevelled and toothless, came careening through the open door of her hut, her arms waving gaily, her feet, legs, hips, moving in rhythm, her dance-loving soul stirring her body to action at the discordant notes of the band.

The path circled up, and the dancers and singers who had followed us now began to drop back, little groups of them falling off entirely at each turn in the steepening trail. Overhead the blue sky was burned with light, and no breath of air moved to cool the sun-tired hillside. My feet began to drag and sweat poured from under my heavy helmet. The band had less volume now, and Bugler, who was puffing quite as much as I, had decided to dispense entirely with the doubtful use of his hat. He had tied the bugle to his belt, having given up trying to blow it two or three turns back. Bass Horn was still going strong, in fact, he was carrying the melody—or what there was of it—now, and as we went on, ever up and winding, all but one other member of the band blew a last lusty note and then went into stoic silence.

When finally we reached level ground and the cool, shuttered shadows of the first stone building, only Bass Horn and Bass Drummer remained in anything even remotely resembling condition. Each seemed determined that he would be the last to stop. First, from several hundred feet ahead, would come the feeble thud of a tired fist on a drumhead. A pause would follow, heavy breathing filling in the gap, then a windy *Boomp!* from Bass Horn.

As we entered the mission house, leaving them and the sunlight for the dim coolness inside, I paused for

one last look back. Bass Drummer sat on his upturned drum. His woolly head was in his hands and one finger slowly scratched a thumping temple. Bass Horn stood above him, his short black legs shooting out from the sparkling coils, and his arms twined in and among them. He blew, feebly, but still a blow, and paused, waiting. Nothing happened. *B-o-o-m-p!* He blew again, ending with a drawn-out, tired hiss. Another pause, then slowly Bass Drummer shook his head. Out from his brass house popped Bass Horn, his face lit in the smile of a victor.

The door closed. The house was cool and dim and quiet. I was in Africa at last!

Chapter II

It had started, I suppose, thirteen years before, for this was June, 1933. I was eighteen years old, but I had done my first African hunting (in fantasy, to be sure) when I was five. It sounds absurd to say this, I suppose, but it is true. For it was on my fifth birthday that my father had given me a priceless gift—a .22 calibre Winchester rifle which his father had given him on his fifth birthday and which I (if I ever have a son) shall give to him when he is five years old.

My father had always loved and respected guns, and particularly this one which he had treasured for all but the first five years of his life. He had taught me carefully how to use it and how not to abuse it, had sternly forbidden the shooting of birds and squirrels, and given me an awe of the responsibility which is a part of owning a firearm of any kind.

With the gun came the added gift of stories about guns and hunting, tales of the "deep bush" that fired my imagination and desire.

I have two brothers and to these, too, Father gave rifles on their fifth birthdays. Then began a period of joy I shall never forget. For the four of us, led by Dad, of course, became mighty hunters, trappers and Indian Scouts. Often we would go on long expeditions into the woods, Dad in the lead, Bill and Stan and I following while we crept forward looking for unwary

redskins, or elephants, or tigers. Sometimes we would split up and scout in different directions, coming back to report to Dad that the redskins were in yonder hollow, or that we had found elephant tracks.

Of course we never shot anything but tin cans, for this all took place within easy walking distance of our home in Glendale, Ohio.

Sometimes, when my mother and sister would go away for the day, Dad would give the cook and maid a day off. Then the four of us would troop into the kitchen with our guns firmly clutched in our hands, as though we had just got in from a long hunt. Dad would cook beans and serve them to us in pie-tins, and we would sit in a circle in the kitchen and eat them, with our guns lying across our laps, our eyes keen against the unexpected approach of an enemy, whether man or beast.

I remember that at one of these feasts of beans I was so happy and so moved by love for the rifle lying across my knees that in a sudden exaltation I raised the gun swiftly and kissed it, then looked about shamefacedly as I became aware that my brothers were glancing at each other in silent disapproval of my effeminacy.

Alone, I used to take myself to a part of the garden where high bushes furnished a perfect jungle, and squat in them by the hour, peopling them with savages and wild beasts. The sparrows hopping stupidly about on the lawn became tawny lions, the robins, elephants. I dug pitfalls for them, spiking the bottom with thorns, in lieu of spears, and scattering grains of corn to lure them to their destruction; and waited hopefully for a hunter's triumph which never came.

In spite of the protests of my mother and my teacher, I almost never went to school without the .22 rifle. The teacher, to be sure, made me stand it in the corner, but often, when her back was turned, I would stealthily retrieve it and hold it across my knees while I turned the pages of my geography to a map of Africa which my imagination peopled with beasts of fact and fancy.

Yet I suppose that it never really occurred to me,

until the day when my decision was made on the spur of the moment, that I would ever actually go there.

It was on a Sunday late in April, 1933. Contrary to my inclination I went to church with my mother, and settled back in our pew, my mother on one side of me, and my aunt on the other, expecting to pass the next hour in dozing boredom. Our regular rector was not to speak, but we were to listen to a man from Liberia—a missionary.

And then he came out and began talking. He didn't stand in the pulpit, but walked about before it, talking in a natural voice, telling us about Cape Mount, the Episcopal mission at Robertsport, an Americo-Liberian town in the Vai country, from which thousands of slaves had been shipped in the past. He told us of the deep pit, the ruins of which are still there, in which captives had been imprisoned while waiting for slave ships, and how they had been hoisted with chains, like the black cargo they were considered, from the pit to be loaded onto the ship. And he said that he had learned more of the true spirit of Christianity from the natives he had gone to Liberia to teach than he had been able to take to them.

I turned to my mother.

"Mother, may I go to Liberia?" I asked.

"Yes, you may if you like," she said.

I turned to my aunt.

"I'm going to Africa," I said.

The suddenly awakened desire, the consent, the decision to go, came in as little time as that. Then came the more difficult task of convincing Robert Dickerson, the missionary, that it was wise for me to go, of getting his consent to letting me return with him.

But in the end I did, and, beautifully supplied with equipment by Dad (who, I think, would have liked to be going himself), I started a month later. Included in my equipment was the .405 Winchester, the "*Kamah gun*" which later became famous all along the coast and throughout the interior of Liberia, and the '22

Winchester which I took along because I could not bear to leave it behind. It had become the symbol of all guns to me.

It was arranged that, while I was not to be officially attached to the mission, I could help there and act as an escort to some of the mission women when they went into the interior to establish schools.

The ship proceeded by way of Europe. When we stopped at Rotterdam, Dr. Werner Junge joined us to go back to Cape Mount and take charge of the mission's medical work. He had been in Liberia before, working for five years in the interior. He was a large man with a face marked by duelling scars and eyes which showed traces of the suffering he had seen during his years of helping the natives. He was but twenty-eight years old. I liked him at once and spent as much time as possible with him for the remainder of the trip, learning as much as I could of the interior and the way the natives lived there.

Now it had happened at last. I stood in the gathering dusk of my first day on African soil. A silence that was cool and almost tangible was falling on the land. Softly it came, and softly the bird's songs mellowed into drowsiness. Close by a cricket chirped, while behind me, where I stood on a little hill, a lazy drone from locusts answered in the leaf-trembling bush.

The town was at my feet, so close, it seemed, that as I looked I almost felt I could reach over and pick up its tiny houses nestled along the shore, lift the miniature surfboats from the water, and pluck the scattered islands from the bay, laying them cool, like damp, dewy moss, on the fingers of my hand.

The ocean was to the left, while in front stretched the long, sandy bar, foamy at the end and muffled in a distant roar where the pass broke through. Just beyond, a river opened a wide mouth and, writhing back like a silver snake, hid itself in the green of the jungle lowlands. To the right the bay narrowed, then became wider and finally spread out into a large lake. Behind

it, and on all sides, was, the forest, flat at first, then humping into little hills until, far off in the distance, mountains jutted up, one upon another, and bubbled away in clouds and the flaming colours of the sky.

Veiled in silence, those far-off mountains seemed to speak of mystery and hold fantastic tales of strange people and of secret things that were beyond. Something in them was alive, something deep and inscrutable.

As I watched the last thin strip of light fade against the green, a voice brought me from my dreaming.

"You like them?" it asked, in perfect English.

Startled, I turned about. A small black man stood close beside me. He was barefoot, and a dark blue cloth fell from his shoulders to his knees, making him, at first, look taller than he really was. He was young, not more than thirty at most, but his eyes seemed older. They looked into me, not boring and inquisitive, but softly, with deep understanding. I liked him instantly.

"Why, yes . . . I do. I didn't hear you come. How long have you been here?"

The man walked in front of me, bent over in a half-bow, and held out his hand.

"You are a stranger in this country. I give you greeting, Massah."

I took his hand and shook it, but as I started to draw my hand away he held it and the second finger of his hand pressed against mine insistently. Dickerson had told me about the custom of snapping fingers in greeting, and had shown me how it was done, so I was able to co-operate, even if awkwardly, as he snapped his fingers four times in mine, then put his hand over his heart for a moment. I laughed.

"That's an interesting way to shake hands," I said.

"In my country it is a custom," he answered. "If you don't like a man, and have no time for him, you don't snap his fingers. If you like him, you snap once; if he is your friend, twice; if he is your good friend and brother, three times." He paused and his face relaxed

in a smile. "But if the man is your master and father, you snap four times."

I looked at him incredulously, wondering for a moment if I was being made the butt of a quiet joke, but his face was serious.

"Thank you," I said, and we both laughed.

His eyes wandered toward the distant mountains.

"You are looking toward my country," he said, his voice deep and soft.

"Are you a Vai man?" I asked, for I thought, in my vague knowledge, that he was looking toward the Vai country.

He drew himself up proudly.

"I am Mendi," he said. "The Vai country is here." He moved his hand in a wide arc around the river and lake and mission. "My country lies beyond. The Vai people come from us."

I had heard the story from Robert Dickerson—how a group of Mendi people, bent on going to the seashore for salt to use in the slave trade, had started for the coast many generations before. On the way some of them had wearied of the journey and had made camp, saying they would wait there. The others went on to the coast for salt. But once there they had settled and stayed, traded in slaves, and become the Vai tribe, which in Mendi means "Those who go on." They had gained prestige with the whites through their association with white traders and the adoption of many white customs and some measure of white dress, but they had lost much of their bush wisdom and so of caste with their own people.

And the first group, the group who had made camp to wait for the salt people's return, had formed a new group, too, and become the Kono people, taking their name from the Mendi word *konokeh*, "to wait."

But the Mendi people, from whom both groups came, had developed a high degree of native culture, and remained one of the most highly respected people in all Liberia among the natives themselves. And so I looked at my companion with renewed interest.

"Are you a chief?" I asked.

"I am a man, Massah."

"I know, but are you a chief in your own country? What is your name?"

"I am the son of a chief, Massah. My name is Vahnee."

He walked forward a few steps, paused, looking back questioningly, then nodded his head as I followed. The path led down into a patch of darkening bush, wound round and over a little stream, coming out again on another bare knoll which looked down on the one where we had stood. I was puffing when he stopped and turned once more toward the setting sun.

"You are new and the bush does not know you. Soon you will know each other. Some day you will go with me behind those hills, beyond the rivers that cut them and into countries that I have seen. There are great towns, villages that no white man has ever touched——"

He spoke very softly. His words faded off in the sighing of the trees and I did not answer. I did not want to move or speak. Were there unknown towns left? Were there people in this small bit of Africa who had seen no white men? Were there trails and rivers and forests that no white men had ever known?

I turned to ask Vahnee something of this, but he was no longer there!

I called him, but there was no answer. No sound had come, yet he was not there. The forest was silent.

Standing alone, I watched my first African sunset. I saw the mountains grow dim and soft in a reddish light—then dusky, and fade away. Fires were being lighted in the town and a faint smell of smoke came up on the cooling breeze. Some wandering wind from the valley—from the mountains perhaps—which, though it brought smoke, brought also the smell of the swamps and the trees. There was a deep wind that whispered and lulled as it passed.

It was pitch dark and I thought for the first time of getting back. How would I see? I hadn't even a

match! Looking down in the direction from which we had come, I saw what seemed to be a small fire or a burning of some sort in the thicket by the stream. I felt my way down the slope and soon saw the flame of a lighted torch. It was stuck in the bank, and beside it I was sure I saw a man sitting. When I reached the bank, though, there was no one there. I picked the torch up—rather mystified by the whole thing—and walked slowly on toward the buildings. Several times I felt that someone was behind me, but he did not reveal himself. Already he who had snapped my fingers four times, calling me father and master, was taking care of me.

I paused, just below the first houses, and put the flame out. Off from beyond the bay came the distant throb of muffled drums. Dance drums! African drums! A pulsing vibrant beat that seemed to fill the night with weird and subtle voices. And somehow I seemed to be a part of it. New, yes, all was new, but somehow not strange and remote as I had first supposed. It was familiar. Something in me—deep down and silent—answered; answered each smell, each sound, each touch. I was not surprised, for it was home. In a new room perhaps—but home.

Chapter III

For the next seven days in Africa I slept. It was as if I were in a somnambulant state; my eyes were heavy with drowsiness, and my feet dragged with some unseen weight which seems to anchor all newcomers for their first long west coast week. The memories of things happening around me during those first seven sun-sleepy days are shadowy and diffused; but here and there a sudden clear-cut picture is sharply outlined against the drowsy background.

I have a vague and beautifully drowsy memory of sitting on the back piazza of the big stone house and looking off toward the mountain which rose so close and green above it, a mountain that was silent and thoughtful in the hours of heat and then, at dusk, began to move and murmur and give strange sounds of monkeys, and plaintive calls from sun-parched hornbills' throats. With dark another change would come. The monkeys would stop their hungry chatter and the birds, with ghostlike whirr of wings, would glide off to roost, while a new, strange world of sound and smell would descend on the mountain to rule.

I remember a little band of naked boys curiously watching me from the trees beyond the path and whispering among themselves at each move that I made. Then, when I stopped and walked toward them, they backed shyly away, their eyes black, glisten-

ing beads that danced about and, burning, caught the sun. Suddenly I ran toward them. They didn't seem to move, but they were gone. I stood in the cool, sheltered quiet of the bush; the children had stood there a moment before. Now only a little footprint in the soft mud showed that they had been there. A rich, damp greenhouse smell was in the air. I crept forward a few paces and looked carefully and listened. All was silence, and I was alone. With a strange uncanny feeling, my heart very loud in my ears, I moved back through the leaves to the path. There I paused a minute and turned to look again. A dozen black and shiny faces peered out through the trees where I had stood. Their eyes were very wide. One of them shook his head slowly and another smiled. Then they disappeared again, and still there was no sound.

I remember a group of excited, screaming women panting up the hill from the town with an unconscious girl on a litter, and an old mother running past me to the doctor's house. Then he, tall and calm-faced, coming out to lift the child in his arms and hurry along the rough trail to the hospital. An hour later the women were walking back, chanting and laughing, the girl marching proudly before them. Behind, a hundred paces or more, was the doctor, a smile on his face, but a strained, tired look in his eyes.

I remember a house-boy dashing up to my room to say a king had come to see me. Walking down to the piazza I found a straight, proud Gola chief with smooth oiled skin and a broad silver wristlet on his right arm; a bright woven red cloth hanging from his shoulders which, as he bowed, fell forward in folds to shadow a muscular chest. I shook hands with him and snapped fingers, then listened as his rich, deep voice rolled out in speech with his interpreter. The interpreter pointed toward the Gola mountains, saying the King Saybu lived beyond them and that the chief had come from him to bring a small *dash* in the hope that I would visit him. The chief handed me an ivory tusk and a heavy, thick beaten-gold ring, then turned to

bow and go, smiling when I said that I had a *dash* for him to take back to his king. He spoke again to the interpreter while I went to my room to get tobacco and salt and gunpowder. When I came down I found him gone, and the interpreter standing with eyes wide.

"The chief said that he came to give, not to receive, *dashes*. He comes from across the forest of Kongbah," the interpreter said.

"Is it far?" I asked him.

"It is too far, Massah," he answered. "You must never go there."

He would say no more, and I looked again toward those strangely mysterious mountains. Again I felt that call, and deep inside the answer. I walked to the kitchen to find the cooks and house-boys standing silent and watching something which writhed and kicked on the floor. Driver ants were all about, and I saw that great lines of them—tens of thousands in a single mass—were passing through the open room to get cockroaches and the crumbs of food which lay about. They had found a large gray rat and, before he could run to safety, had seethed over and were slowly killing him as he lurched and squealed helplessly. The boys seemed hypnotized. The rat kicked more feebly and his squeals stopped entirely. The ants completely covered him as they dragged him through a drain hole. The boys were still silent. They looked at me a moment, then down the path that the chief had taken. As I turned to go they still looked, and I heard one say, "Has it a witchcraft meaning, Wah?"

And that was the end of my first week. Then suddenly things began to happen and I forgot about being drowsy.

Harvey Simmonds was planning to leave the mission for a six months' furlough in the United States. But for a long time he had been planning another trip into the hinterland before he went. A paramount chief in the lower country had sent word, some time before I had arrived, that he needed food, and had invited Simmonds to come and shoot elephants. Simmonds

Surfboat head man
sitting at tiller



Starting up the
Mafa river in a
surfboat

had sent word back that another white hunter was coming with a marvellous gun (my .405) and that he would wait and come then. It was because of this that the chief from King Saybu's country had come and brought me *dashes*, hoping that I would bring my *Kamah* gun to his country and shoot elephants, and also that, through acquaintance with me and through doing favours for me, he would further certain projects of his own with the mission.

Now I had had my seven days' sleep and Simmonds was eager to go. But eagerness is an inadequate word to name that which I felt as we made our plans and preparations.

To begin with, the two of us went over my gear. It was modest, to say the least, and after reading what some hunters take into the bush on elephant hunts I wonder what on earth they do with it. Mine consisted of a .405 lever-action, five-shot, high-powered rifle; a twelve-gauge pump gun; a hundred cartridges for the rifle (of which I used only fifty during a year of hunting), and three hundred shells for the shotgun. (I bought about six hundred more during the year.) As for bush clothes, I had four pairs of khaki shorts, bought at a colonial agent's in London. For these I paid the ridiculous sum of two pounds ten shillings each, and after they wore out, which was in one month, I had four more pairs made by a native on the coast who charged me two shillings each. If I hadn't smiled, he would have come down to one. He thought he had made a monkey of me and bought all his friends drinks. I wore the shorts he made for me all that year, and I still wear them.

Then I had two pairs of light riding breeches. I wore one pair once and didn't even see a bird. "Just the thing for elephants!" said the agent. Now I believe he was right, for they swished with each step, and an elephant could hear me at a hundred yards! I bought one pair of army boots from the same agent and I wore them one morning and one afternoon, and afterward limped for two weeks. Besides these I had

mosquito boots, six khaki bush shirts and several pairs of white shorts. The rest of the things, such as socks, etc., were just what I would take camping any place in summer. Of course, I had a helmet for day and a mosquito net to cover me at night. They are more important than food for the non-native in Liberia.

The whole matter of clothes dwindled down to this: shorts, a loose bush shirt or a jersey, khaki hunting helmet and low sneakers. The absence of boots was rather painful at first, for I caught my legs on every bit of razor grass and thorn bush I came to. After a month, though, I learned to walk "hunter fashion," and from then on I had very few scratches. And scratches are bad things to have in the bush, for the smallest cut easily becomes infected and, before you know it, turns into a spreading ulcer, a devil to cure; and some, even with the best of care, last for months.

The trick of walking as the hunters do is really an art. In only loincloths and tight-fitting woven jackets, they glide along through the densest bush as quietly as caterpillars and as gracefully as sleek male leopards. Hunting in Liberia is almost entirely in deep bush—you can seldom see more than twenty feet ahead, and most of the time not ten—so it is easy to see how too many clothes would hinder.

The eyes of native hunters are keen beyond Western conception, and they can see the snags and knife-edged grasses before they come to them. If they feel the slightest prick they take a quick, almost imperceptible move back and without breaking their stride in the least swing around it and are left untouched. When you have sprinted after a native hunter through unbelievably dense swamp jungle, with a snorting bush cow just six jumps behind you, and stop on the other side, your arms and legs torn and bleeding and your clothes ripped half off, only to find the hunter scratchless and calm-eyed, you have a healthy respect for his agility.

I knew nothing of how to prepare an outfit for a month's trip into the country, but Simmonds was an

old hand at it. The "takes" and "don't-takes," "do's" and "don't-do's" that he taught me I should have been lost without later when I was alone. Simple things like being sure your drinking water is boiled at least twenty minutes to kill all possible dysentery germs; having your net over you at night; taking quinine or some anti-malarial dose every day and, most important of all, having your helmet on from seven or eight in the morning until after four in the afternoon—*rain or shine*—if you are not sheltered by a heavy roof. I thought that it was foolish to wear one in the rain, and once, in a cold morning storm, I walked a hundred yards bare-headed from a hut to a chief's compound across a small village. Two hours later everything went black and I remember the next two days vaguely, but painfully.

Then there was the job of getting carriers. We needed forty boys and a headman. It was easy enough to go to the Vai chief on the shore and get that number from him at a shilling each a day, but Simmonds knew his bush trekking better than this. He took a day for the careful selection of ten good men from each of four different tribes: Vai, Gola, Bassa, and Buzi. When you take all your carriers from one tribe it is just like having one big happy family, and in a big family such as this, rice and salt and tobacco constantly disappear in a most mysterious fashion, and no one seems to know where they went. They just go, and all the boys shake their heads and say, "My! My! How could that have happened! There must have been witches here in the dark of the sun." Sometimes rice falls out of their mouths when they say it. It is not stealing—it's just an old clannish trick. With four tribes, though, no such miracles happen, at least very seldom do they happen. Each tribe is jealous of every other, and each member wants you to hire only boys of his own tribe. The boys watch each other like boxers. As a result, if the Bassas take a single leaf of tobacco, even before it is out of smelling distance the other three tribes are around you, howling like fence cats, and begging you to drive "those awful thieves" away and get ten of

their "honest brothers." Instead of two fair eyes you have sixty good ones, and very little if anything goes unaccounted for.

After Simmonds had picked the porters—no headman needed in this case, for each group elected one of its own tribe to be responsible—we went down to the traders' stores in town to buy our boatload of supplies. *A hundred pounds of salt, a hundred pounds of raw trade leaf tobacco, ten flasks of gunpowder and several bolts of many-coloured cotton cloth* were bought to be used as *dashes* for chiefs and for buying chickens and fruit when the people would not accept silver. To this, six hundred pounds of rice for the boys' food was added, and the whole hulking mass packed into tin boxes and left in a warehouse until we were ready to go. There was a rice famine in the country, otherwise we could have got food there. Then up the hill again, where more trunks were filled with our clothing, blankets, nets, cots, paper, pencils, and fifty pounds in silver and copper coin.

Next came the "chop boxes." In them were the tinned foods we would need, together with coffee, tea, sugar, spices, refined salt, powdered milk, flour, etc., while other things such as pots, pans, buckets, lanterns, eating utensils, soap, a water filter, water flasks, kerosene, matches, medical supplies, cartridges, shells, and hundreds of vacuum tins of cigarettes were packed, wedged, jammed and forced down by jumping on the lids, into forty-pound loads.

After the last lid had been fastened on the boxes and our guns laid beside the heap of paraphernalia, we ate a big dinner of bush goat haunch with rice and sweet potatoes and plantain. Since we were to start early the next morning and I felt sleepy after the heavy food, I decided to go to bed. Once there, however, I felt wide awake. I was going on an elephant hunt! How did one hunt them? Where was the "right spot" to shoot at? Question after question went through my excited mind.

The room was dark, but outside a whitish moon

made little banks of fluffy clouds look like furrows of fresh December snow on a ploughed field. Across them a lone bull elephant seemed to walk, and in a dream he still was there. He was big and had beady eyes and ears like umbrellas blown inside out. A long time he watched me and then suddenly, when I stooped to offer him some snow, he ran toward me and grabbed my arm. The boy who brought in the tub of bath water a moment later had a funny look in his eye, and at breakfast I heard him say to the cook: "The new Massah fight like hell when I wake him to start on long trip!"

On the beach there was great commotion. The sun was up and gave a warm red tinge to the oily skins of forty carriers as they milled about and argued as to how best to load the large eight-oared surfboat which was to take them and the outfit across the lake to Bendu, our first night village. They stopped talking and did it when Simmonds arrived. Then the big clumsy craft was pushed out into the water, and with clicking of oarlocks and a low moaning chant they disappeared around a bend in the lake. Two hours later the mission outboard launch was carried down from the hill where it had been freshly painted, and after four hours of motor spinning and priming—this one was no exception to the rule—it started and we headed out across the noon-hot bay and into the lake. We were heavily weighed down, for besides the two of us there were four mission boys on vacation to act as gun-boys, and over the bow of the boat were draped two clumsy four-man carrying hammocks. An hour out in the lake a wind came up and it took us another hour to make the eighteen miles to Bendu.

The boys had arrived long before and, together with all the villagers, were waiting on the sand to greet us. It was with a strange feeling that I stepped ashore and walked into my first real African village.

The fifty-odd round and square, neatly thatched mud huts had their dark little doors and windows casually facing and seeming to watch the large open

palaver house in their midst. Spotted here and there among them were clusters of coconut palms, and beyond the village on all but the lake side was the forest; dark, seemingly impenetrable, and leaning forward ever so slightly as though, if you looked away, it would jump in and take again to itself that little patch of sunlight it had lost to man. I felt this pressing feeling in all but one village in Africa. It had an eerie atmosphere of its own, but it was above the jungle, while this and the others were hemmed in by it. Here the forest seemed to scowl and wait; it seemed to say that man-made huts did not belong there and some day it would creep forward to cover them with green again. It had tremendous patient power, and as I breathed its damp leafy air I felt that it would some day reclaim its own.

Our arrival had interrupted the district commissioner's monthly court, but since he was becoming rather bored with a case over who would pay for a villager's dead chicken—the case having lasted three days already—he adjourned it and named himself our official host. He was a Vai man and had a son in the mission school, and he did his best to make us comfortable. He took us to the town chief's house and, after chatting with him for a while, we took baths and settled down for the afternoon. In the evening the district commissioner came again to see us and brought *fu-fu* with pepper sauce which, though we had already eaten our own supper, we had to swallow to be polite.

Fu-fu is made of pounded cassava root and tastes exactly as very thick, rubbery paste should. He *dashed* us a large bowl of the stuff and insisted on staying around while we ate it. I think he knew we wouldn't have eaten if he had gone away.

As a combined result of the *fu-fu* and malaria, Simmonds became ill, and our trip was delayed for two days. Even after he recovered he was so weak that we continued our trek in hammocks. Starting early in the morning, we reached M'balomah at nightfall.

We had two four-man shifts for each hammock, and so the trip was made speedily and with as much ease as could be expected from this means of transportation. Since there are no railroads nor vehicular roads of any kind in this part of the interior of Liberia, if one does not wish to walk there is no other way to go. In the trips which followed I used hammocks very seldom. They have about the comfort of a camel in a rock quarry, and I had to be awfully tired or lame to choose one in place of my feet.

Their construction is simple. A main pole about eight feet long has a four-foot crosspiece fastened at each end. The hammock is slung along the centre pole, and boys hold up, on their heads, the four ends of the two crosspieces. Sometimes a canopy is hung over the top or a chair is hung in place of the hammock. And then, once in, you jog along. If you can keep the boys out of step the ride is beautifully smooth. But Africans are born with rhythm, they can't walk out of step.

In very rough country a two-man carry is used, but on the whole the principle is the same; the results, too. As a result of rough riding, sweat-dripping backs, and boys who groan with artistic feeling and get your sympathy by telling you how heavy you are, before long, if you aren't a Simon Legree, you're walking along with them wondering why the devil you ever took a hammock in the first place.

In M'balomah two elephant hunters were waiting to greet us. They were fine-looking fellows who spent all of the evening telling Simmonds how glad they were to see him alive and well, snapping fingers at him across the room, and punctuating their conversation with "*Isseh! Isseh!*" And when they had any bad news to tell, any word of sickness or accident or pain or misfortune of any kind, they would always absolve God from blame by preceding the news itself with "*Kassai bele kambah Mahni*," which, literally translated, means, "There's no rust on God."

"There's no rust on God," they would say, "but I've got a devil of a sore leg!" Or, "There's no rust on

God, but my brother was knocked down by the charge of an elephant and has a broken arm."

It was late the next afternoon before we got, as politely as possible, onto the trivial subject of elephants and where best they could be located. When they did start on it, though, there was no stopping them, and for two much-too-short days they entertained us with stories of their prowess, adventures in the bush, and tales of elephants so large that when a hunter climbed on their bellies after they were killed he had had to take a day's supply of rice to keep from starving before he climbed down the next evening. Each of them had brought down several of these Everest-like fellows and they said, not without modesty, that we probably would, too, when we learned as much about the "medicine" of hunting as they knew.

During those two days, when we weren't listening with mouths hanging slightly open and eyes like ice-slick acorns, we were showing off our guns and trying to convince them that, though they looked small when compared to long clumsy spear-guns, they, nevertheless, packed a wallop worthy of the best of elephants. This we finally did by shooting a hole through a large palm tree which both hunters had offered to stand behind because they knew no gun could shoot through it. A crowd of people gathered to see the exhibition, and there wasn't a man among them who didn't agree with the hunters and offer to stand behind the tree himself. One we had actually to pull away from the tree for our first shot, but he changed his mind after he had stuck his fist into the bullet hole. Even then, though, everyone came to the conclusion that not the gun, but some witchcraft power we had when we held it in our hand, had made the hole.

Their reason for not believing in a small-looking gun is that theirs are six-foot affairs of the muzzle-loading, Napoleonic Wars variety, and in them, instead of a cigarette-length cartridge, they stuff powder and wadding and a three-foot wooden shaft topped by a trowel-shaped iron spear point.

Finally, on the third morning, just as the sun was changing the sky from black to grey and then red, we started out. There were sixteen of us: the two big hunters and a young hunter, two trackers, two gun-boys, six carriers, a cook, Simmonds and I. We entered the forest and headed due east—the direction we had come all the time—following a little overgrown trail which soon turned into nothing; we cut our own from then on. The three hunters were always before us, their cutlasses flashing and the vines and small saplings swishing as they fell aside to make a thin path for us. Overhead bands of monkeys chattered, and occasionally by streams deer would start, crash off into the bush a hundred feet and then stop to watch us as we passed. And always we went due east over hills, across rivers and up rocky ravines where the thick jungle hung heavy about us and where there was no sun and the air was damp and musty. How they knew that we were going in the right direction was beyond me. Without compasses, of course, through brush where every tree looked exactly like its neighbour, the hunters went on steadily and unerringly; straight as bees and silent as thrushes at night.

In mid-afternoon we came on our first signs of elephants. We were crossing a shallow bamboo swamp and at the far end of it by a stream we saw places where the poles had been torn down. Great bunches of fibrey pulp with the juices chewed from them lay scattered on the ground, and all about were large, ominous-looking tracks half filled with stagnant water. I looked at them, stupefied by their size, and felt a strange, creepy feeling slither up my back. As we passed along and saw an eight-inch thick sapling which had been ripped up by its roots and thrown aside, its leaves now yellow and withered, we stopped again to look. The hunters said the elephants had passed three days before. We went on faster, for we yet had miles to go, and as I walked along I found my throat was dry. I took a drink from the water flask, but it was still dry and, strangely, I was not thirsty.

There was sweat on my forehead, too, but I wasn't hot.

At five o'clock we stopped on a little knoll that rose above a bubbling spring. While the boys cut thatch and bamboo sticks for a shelter, Kahmo, the main hunter, and I went out to look for some "meat" for supper. I was surprised to find, after we had walked for five minutes, that he wasn't looking for tracks. He just walked quietly along and finally stopped on the edge of a low patch of scrub bush, motioning me to go over by a tree and stand silently. I had put three loads of buckshot in my gun and stared blankly at him—not knowing quite what else to do—while he crouched down and, taking a deep breath, started to emit high-pitched nasal calls. He did it by pressing his fingers over his nose and then "meowing" like a cat in distress. I was coming to the conclusion that he was out of his head or in some way slightly queer when I heard an answering sound from off in the thickets and soon saw a small bush goat running toward him. One lucky shot brought it down and, much bewildered by the whole affair, I watched him cut its throat and lift the animal to his shoulders. Going back to the camp, I began to understand their feeling that we had witchcraft in our guns. This trick of his was nothing short of magic so far as I was concerned.

Simmonds straightened it out for me when we arrived. It seems that Diakers and other small bush antelope will answer a call like their own and run toward it. It seemed rather unsportsmanlike at first to take advantage of them, but tracking "small meat" is impossible in the bush; and later I learned there are times when knowing the trick keeps you from starving to death.

An hour from camp the next morning we came upon fresh tracks which the hunters stooped to examine carefully. There were droppings on the ground and by their look Kahmo said the elephants had been there only an hour before; two of them had been there, browsing along together, a fair-sized cow and a large

bull. The big one's front prints measured nineteen inches across. Gbanyah, the older hunter, held his hand up to his forehead to show how large he guessed the tusks were. Then the two gun-boys and trackers and the three hunters smiled and said we would follow these.

For eight struggling hours we went at a killing pace through bush seemingly so impenetrable and cruel that I thought I soon must fall from sheer fatigue and aching—over hills and down rough mountainsides, crawling on our bellies through thorn patches and wading across streams where we had to hold the guns high above our heads to keep them from getting wet. At times, for minutes on end, I could see no signs or tracks at all. I would grow discouraged and think we had lost the trail. I would say so, and Kahmo would shake his head and bend down to pick up a crushed beetle or a trampled blade of grass, sometimes point to a leaf turned over with its wet side up.

"The elephants did this," he would whisper through my gun-boy. "They are now but beyond the next valley. We must hurry, Massah—*hurry*."

Then on again, and soon I would see fresh droppings or a place where one had slipped going over a rotten log. I would take heart and follow as fast and as quietly as possible.

The hunters were wonderful, for they never seemed to be in doubt and always kept that steady pace, gliding on silently in front of us and occasionally cutting a branch or small sapling with a noiseless whip of their cutlasses. Now and again, as the signs became fresher, they would stop to listen for a moment and, hearing nothing, go on at the same rhythmic stride.

Once during the morning we came to a high bare rock hill, and, listening, we heard the crack of brush just on the other side. The boys quickly handed us our guns and close behind the hunters we started up cautiously. When we reached the top I was trembling, my hands wet and shaking as they clutched the gun. I almost cried when we saw that the two had passed

down into the ravine below. I was ready to stop, for surely, now, we could never reach them. Simmonds felt the same way about it; we had about decided to go back to camp for the night when we came to a place where the elephants had stopped for some time, pulling down branches and eating the tender leaves and shoots. That was the noise we had heard, and when the hunters saw the place we knew it meant something was about to happen, for Gbanyah became very excited and pulling off his jacket he poured some oily "medicine" over his head and body, and carefully rubbed it over his forehead and heart. The hunters believe this makes them invisible to the elephant and they all have some dope or fetish to protect them. Then, for half an hour, we moved on more slowly until we came to a very thick clump of bush where, again, we stopped to listen.

I heard nothing but my heart pounding in my ears and felt nothing but an overdose of adrenalin go zipping into my blood, but the hunters must have heard more. They spoke a few words quick to the young hunter and the next minute he, together with the gun-boys, was scurrying back along the trail. They seemed fairly to melt into the forest. With only the four of us I felt alone.

Now both hunters were naked but for their loin-cloths and charm bracelets. After putting the spears down into their guns, they started creeping stealthily into the thick bush, motioning us to follow. After about three minutes we stopped and I heard, not more than a hundred yards ahead, the sharp crack of a branch, then a rustling, leafy sound as it was pulled to the ground. The hunters, who were a few feet beyond us, froze tight, and I saw Kahmo's eyes get very big, then his hair rise and stand straight up on his head. They beckoned to us to come quickly.

Ahead and facing us, not more than thirty yards away, the upper part of his body rising above the low scrub, was a tremendous bull elephant. His trunk was up and about to pull down a branch. As we watched,

too awed to breathe, the trunk slowly came down until it was pointing straight at us. Then with a windy swish the ears came out, and all I could see was their huge wavering blackness framing two bloodshot eyes and a pair of golden-brown tusks. The tip of the trunk seemed close enough to touch and, as it swung about in slow searching circles, I was sure I could feel hot breath burning in my face.

A feeling of overwhelming excitement mingled with, not fear, but vague helplessness, swept through me. There was an old familiar smell in the air, and in that moment as the elephant started toward us I tried wildly to place it. My mind had made it a key, and I wanted frantically to find it. Again and again it kept shouting: "You must remember! . . . You must remember! . . ." Then it came. Little boys laughing in the streets, lions and tigers and monkeys in gaudy wagons, the sound of a marching parade. Through it—the very essence of it—this strange and mysterious smell. I must have spoken the word, for a voice beside me whispered:

"Quiet! I'll tell you when to shoot. Steady now."

When to shoot! Lord, where to shoot, that was the thing!

I looked up. The elephant was gliding toward me. He was closer; there was too much to shoot at! My hand began to tremble violently and I looked down at my rifle; as soon as I did I realized it was the worst thing in the world to do. It was a heavy gun and it was fairly long, but suddenly it seemed to have no weight, and it dwindled in size to the length of a tiny toothpick. The feeling of excitement went, and awful helplessness was all that was left. I had nothing! My hands were empty! The gun was a useless tin-soldier toy!

I looked back for the hunters. They were gone! They had located our elephant for us, but they would not stay close by while we tried to kill it with those little guns of ours which they did not trust. Now I felt cold, freezing fear. I was numb. I couldn't even

tremble. The elephant was moving faster. His trunk was swinging in wider circles and saliva dripped from his two red nostrils . . . and still I couldn't move. Soon he would reach me!

Harvey Simmonds saw my fear and sought to reassure me.

"Steady now. He's going to turn. He hasn't seen us. Steady!"

Suddenly the elephant turned. He broke into a fast pace, running parallel to us.

"Not now . . . Not now . . ." Simmonds' voice was strangely calm. "All right, now. Give it to him!"

"But where?" A mountain to shoot at—a mountain of moving flesh. Where was the spot in which a bullet would stop it?

I shouted it. Simmonds stared at me. He had an unbelieving look on his face, and I thought he was going to laugh. The elephant must have heard my voice for he spun around and came crashing back. The ground was rumbling under us.

"Before the ear! No, now that he's turned again, in the centre of the forehead. Shoot! Shoot!"

The rifle thundered and it knocked me back a step. Again a roar as the stock cut into my shoulder; smoke burned in my nose. The elephant was turning again, and I fired twice more toward his side. . . . He was down! As I jerked in the fifth cartridge the gun jammed. I pulled frantically at the lever, but the thing was stuck. In a flash—it seemed from nowhere—the other elephant was beside the big one. She butted at his side and, as I ran foolishly forward scarcely knowing what I did, the big one was up, and the two of them crashed away through the thicket. They were gone in a second, and only a distant rumble told of my botch.

The hours that day and the days which followed are things almost unreal. Patches of delirious hope and blackened, empty despair, aching legs and bloody arms, and bodies too tired to feel. Always a trail was before us—a trail which led east, ever east, over mountains

and through swamps that were endless and shapeless like nightmares. Then rain came and the tracks were washed out; slippery muck was all that was left.

But we never found the wounded elephant. Nor did we get a shot at the other, and finally we had to trek back to Cape Mount as we had come, without even a piece of ivory.

Several days later a stranger came to the coast to say that our elephant had been found dead in the forest miles from where I had shot it.

Chapter IV

BACK at Cape Mount I tried to become deeply interested in the mission, but my thoughts kept returning to the bush of which I had glimpsed such a little—just enough to make me want to go back and be a part of it. But the rains were in full swing, drenching the country with curtains of water, and I waited.

Meanwhile Dr. Junge, the young German physician who had made an amazing record in the interior, had established himself at the mission, and natives were flocking from all up and down the coast, and even from outside Liberia, to be helped by him. Five years of work in the interior had made the natives trust, respect and love him. He had built a "model village" back in the bush, in which he had established sanitation and hygiene as new gods, and was planning several more. And already he had established a record at the mission by operating eight hernias and four hydroceles in one day, with only a sixteen-year-old native boy to assist him, and sending all twelve patients back to their villages in two weeks alive and well!

I had taken on a class of boys to teach reading, but much of my time I spent talking to Dr. Junge, listening to his tales of the interior—for he liked to talk about the people more than about his own work—and asking him questions about his operations. And then, one



Vahnee with Father Joseph Parsell, O.H.C., at the Holy
Cross Mission Monastery at Bolahun, Liberia

day, he invited me to come and watch him operate and, when I eagerly assented, told me to be at the hospital at seven the next morning.

At six-thirty I was sitting on the hospital steps. Around me, standing, lying and sitting, were about fifty men, women and children. We were all waiting for one man, a man who worked alone from sunup until sunset at the never-ending and often thankless task of curing, and still found time to smile. One free doctor for a million needy natives! A hundred would have been overworked, but this one never gave the impression of overwork. And though his meagre salary was hardly enough to live on, he still did not seem to mind. He liked the work, he loved it—it was his life.

Round a bend in the rough, tree-covered trail, Dr. Junge appeared. He was dressed in white shorts and a loose, white open-necked shirt. He had an easy gliding walk. His six feet four of lanky body moved with the smoothness of one accustomed to winding African trails.

As he came near the piazza of the small brick hospital those who could rise stood to greet him. All had their troubles to tell, and lost no time in bursting into their varied dialects, preceding their tales with the assurance that "there was no rust on God," but the doctor told them they must wait, that his morning was planned and filled, and that he could not see them until the afternoon. They believed him, for his schedule was known to all of them. In the afternoons he saw new patients unless, of course, they were emergency cases that had to be taken care of at once. The natives gathered their cloths around them and sat down again to wait. I followed him into the hospital.

The building was an old one and very poorly equipped, but under his hand, inside a month, it had been changed to something unbelievably clean and spotless. The first room we went into was small with a larger one going off to the right of it. The first was used as a dispensary, and the other as a storage room.

Beyond them was a larger one still, about fifteen by fifteen feet, newly painted white, and with a big window cut through to give more light, for there was no electricity in the hospital at the time.

A small wartime operating table was in the centre of the room—the type used in emergency hospitals at the front—and around the sides were enamel-covered washing bowls on little stands with racks for brushes and soap. In one corner an exceedingly out-of-date sterilizer heated by kerosene steamed and puffed in a tired sort of way. We stopped in this room—beyond it were two wards, and in the basement a cement room for contagious diseases and two more wards—and while I stood around twiddling my fingers and trying to look at least a shade as though I knew what was going on, the doctor selected from great trays of instruments, also of the wartime variety, the things he would need for the five operations that morning.

Several bright-looking, white-clad young native boys and girls chosen from the mission schools to help him were standing about watching too. He was teaching them to relieve him of some of this mechanical work, and he was teaching them how to go back and help their people, too—as yet, he had to do all the work himself. He was doomed to have to do it almost always himself, for as soon as he had one group well trained he would send them out to help the natives in the interior and prepare to man the dispensaries and medical stations he was planning to establish there.

When the instruments had been put into the sterilizer, buckets of boiling water—they have no running water—were brought in by several hospital boys and poured into the washing bowls. After heating and dissolving some novocaine, the doctor came over to one of the bowls and, taking off his shirt, started to scrub his hands with a thoroughness that made me feel my own had never been clean! He told me to do so too, and, thinking it rather strange that to watch one had to wash one's hands, I started. But I had never known before what it really meant to wash one's

hands until they are clean. Dr. Junge taught me that day.

In a few minutes he stopped and, after dipping his hands in a bowl of disinfectant, went over to the operating table where the first case had been wheeled in and lifted onto the table. Then he injected novocaine from a tremendous hypodermic syringe into the patient's abdomen. For most work only a local anæsthetic was used, both because general anæsthetics are expensive and because the natives fear them, saying, when the doctor used them, that he "makes them dead and brings them back to life again."

The patient, an old Mendi man, was trembling beneath a sheet with an open slit on the right side above the place where the incision was to be made. When the doctor came over he spoke a few words in the man's language, and then both of them smiled. The trembling stopped. The doctor, covered now in a sterile gown, sat down on a high stool which was pushed under him, and I, similarly garbed, walked at his suggestion over to the other side of the table. A young girl emptied a towel full of instruments onto a tray and, while a nurse painted the man's stomach with iodine, I stood on one foot and then the other, wishing to hell I'd never come over. The doctor pricked the man's skin with a scalpel.

"Feel that?" he asked in Mendi.

"No, Father," the old fellow answered.

"All right then, here we go. Allen, come in closer; keep your head up and swab up the blood with those gauze patches as I cut. Keep the edges clean so I can see what I'm doing."

He had made the incision, and there was nothing for me to do but obey him. His voice went on in an easy conversational way. He explained every move he made. He told me what to do and why to do it. It was a fascinating lecture, and the Mendi man was finished with and sewed up almost before I realized I was actually helping. The others followed fast, the washing act punctuating each operation. Soon the

morning was over, and I—of all things!—had really had my hands in on it.

During the weeks which followed I spent a great deal of time in the operating room, and learned from the doctor things which helped me more in the bush later than all the *dashes* which I carried. With my guns, which could do so much that the native spear guns could not do, I was able to make a place for myself with the natives; but with the knowledge which Dr. Junge gave me I was able to keep their respect.

One morning, at two o'clock, the doctor sent for me and got me out of bed to come and help him with a child who had been carried four days down from the interior after being half-killed by a leopard.

The boy, who was little more than ten, had been mauled at dusk when going to a stream for water, and it had been some time before the villagers had been able to rescue him. When he arrived at the coast four days later, filth, together with heat and flies, had brought him to a desperate state. One leg had been badly torn. A native with one leg is better dead than alive in that part of Africa, and from two until dawn the doctor worked over him—a kindly bright moon and two smoky kerosene lamps his only light. In the end the boy lived and had both his legs to worship the trails with. Skin grafting and delicate surgery by moonlight!

When it was over I was half-sick and slept through the rest of the day. The doctor had had a morning of operating to do after it, and an afternoon of new patients to see and treat. His sleep came late the next night. I waited, but I did not hear him grumble.

He never grumbled. He was never unpleasant to the natives. Though he may not personally have liked some of the people whom he helped, he always made it quite clear that he had come to the bush to cure them and not to be pleased or displeased by their personalities. It was an easy thing to say—at times a very hard thing to do. But in the year in which I spent a great deal of time with him, I never once saw him waver.

A prime example of a time when he might well have forgotten his ruling principle, and surely would have had every right to do so, came when a Senegalese native from French country walked in late one afternoon after the doctor had finished a hard day of operating. The man needed an operation. He had no money, he said, and was indignant when I suggested that he do some light work to help pay for the dressings. He was a cocky show-off, and after I had talked to him for two minutes I felt like telling him to run along. But the doctor came over at that moment to find out what was up.

The native wore a medal proudly on the front of his old uniform which proclaimed that he had served in "the war to end wars and make the world safe for civilization." The doctor, without a change of expression, asked him in French what he had done to win it. "I killed seven German pigs," he answered, and I gritted my teeth and waited for the explosion. But there was none. After straightening out the little point of what classification should be used when speaking of Germans, the doctor operated on him free of charge. What thoughts went through his mind I can only imagine. He kept them deep inside, and two weeks later the man who was so proud of the fact that he had killed seven of the doctor's countrymen went on his way whole.

And then one day a stranger met me on the hospital path, handed me a note written on a piece of goatskin, and silently went away. After I had read it, I forgot the hospital. The note said: "Soon, if you are willing, we will go into the bush together." It was signed, "Your son and headman, Vahnee."

Two days later the same messenger appeared and said that his master, Vahnee, would like to come if I was ready to see him. I sent back word that he was to come that evening, and just at dusk he entered the door of the house I had taken near the mission, the same mysterious figure which had come to me, seem-

ingly from nowhere, during another dusk—that of my first day in Africa. We snapped fingers, said "*Isseh*" to each other, and then sat down to talk. I wanted to know who he was, why he had chosen me to serve, everything about him.

But I learned little of him that night. Most of what I am telling here came bit by bit along bush trails, lying at night in the dark of the forest before bamboo shelters the boys had thrown up for us, waiting for morning in African villages. And some of what I learned came from others.

Vahnee was the son of a Mendi paramount chief, a chief of chiefs. In Liberia the centuries-old native rule proceeds directly from family rule. There is first of all the head of a family. As the family increases it becomes a clan consisting often of as many as twenty towns. And still the head of the family rules them, as head of the clan, or clan chief. And over many chiefs of many families of one people (such as the Mendis, the Vai, the Konos), there is one paramount chief. Thus Vahnee was son of one of the most important chiefs in Liberia—a paramount chief of the Mendis.

Vahnee had scars on his hands and feet, little round scars which made me curious. But it was only after I had known him for a long time that he told me what they were.

He had been sent early to a white mission school, a school in which he was to learn English and the crafts which every Liberian chief must know in order to keep the respect of his people: gold-beating, steel-working, making implements, leather work, carpentry, farming, cloth-weaving.

A white American ran the mission school to which Vahnee was sent, a white churchman whose twisted mind and heart had conceived a strange interpretation of the teachings of gentle Jesus, whose acts demonstrated the belief that godliness consisted of rigid acts of discipline enforced by meting out inhuman cruelty as the rewards of infraction. Floggings

were in common occurrence in that school at that time. There was a dark and damp dungeon in which boys who displeased the master were often confined for days. And there was another punishment, reserved for leaders, boys whose initiative and pride made them resist the minor disciplines of imprisonment and flogging, and from this Vahnee's scars had come.

Vahnee had been crucified. I do not remember what his offence had been, or whether he even told me. But I do remember the simplicity with which he told me, and my horror as I listened. Slumped forward in a sitting position, he had been nailed to a floor, a nail through each foot and one through each hand, and left there for several hours to repent whatever it was that the master had called his sin.

After this he had led a revolt of the boys in the school. They held a palaver and decided that the master should be killed. They caught him, bound his hands and feet, and carried him to a spring where, paying no more attention to his screaming and struggling than they would have had he been a rat, they held his head under the water and waited for him to drown.

But his wife, having heard his screams, came running from the house and began shooting at them with a pistol. She didn't hit anyone, but all the boys, save Vahnee, ran away. Vahnee stood his ground and, when the master's wife came up, he showed her the scars on his hands and feet, and great welts on his back which showed where he had been flogged, and told her and her husband that all of this kind of treatment of the boys must stop, or they would, in truth, kill the man.

Then the boys held another palaver and decided that, although they had refrained from killing him then, blood must be spilt to atone for their blood which he had made to flow. The master had a burro which he had used to ride into the interior and, in the boys' minds, the little ass became a symbol of the man.

They caught the animal, cut his throat, and, since they had originally intended to drown the man, thrust the burro's head into the spring, while blood flowed from his cut throat and crimsoned the water.

After that, for about six months, the master refrained from severe punishments. Then suddenly, like a madman whose madness comes upon him at intervals, cruel floggings, imprisonment and a crucifixion followed each other rapidly. And quietly, without attempting to carry out their threat of violence, every boy in the school left, and none returned until the inhuman master had been removed to come back to the United States and preach about the glory of carrying the religion of Jesus to savage Africa.

Vahnee had heard indirectly from Simmonds that I was coming to Liberia and had decided that he would like to go into the bush with me. And so, on the day when I arrived he lost no time. The mystery and drama with which he had clothed our first meeting and the extravagant compliment he had paid me when he had snapped fingers with me four times had been no accident. He had planned all this carefully. He wanted to impress me and get acquainted with me and learn more of white men through me. And he wanted to travel into the interior with a white man and enjoy the pride of showing his country to me.

Now we sat together and talked of a trip into the interior.

I told him I was ready to go at any time, and when he left that night all was decided. He had twelve carriers of his own, and these, he said, we would take with us. He would take me, he promised, into parts of the forest few white men had ever seen.

After he left that night I sat, for a long time, outside my house, staring into the night, too excited even to try to sleep. I was about to go into one of the wildest, least tenanted parts of the African bush with

no other white men—guided by a native and attended by native boys. This was something which I had dreamed for years would happen to me some day—some far-distant day, I had always thought.

But I had not had to wait so long. It was happening now. And I was eighteen years old.

Chapter V

IN the two days which followed, Vahnee helped me get the loads together. Three guns, a kit of medicine, instruments and dressings, which I got from Dr. Junge, who also gave me scalpels, potassium permanganate, drain tubes, etc., telling me how to use them on myself in case of need, and tobacco, salt and trinkets for *dashes*. The rest of the trek equipment was packed in tin trunks. Early in the morning of the third day, canoes took us across the misty bay. There we moved on to our base town, Kobolya, which lay before us in the gathering night.

When we came to the river which ran before the town one of the carriers called out and a man ran down the bank. He jumped into a large dugout canoe and started paddling across to greet us. Vahnee told me he was Jah Gangah, the town chief, and it was with him that we were to stay.

Jah Gangah spoke English well. As we stood snapping fingers he asked about the trip up, saying "*Isseh!*" over and over, between every two sentences of mine, telling me how glad he was to see us.

I was rather disappointed, though, to find that he did not wear a country gown or loincloth as the other men of the town did. Instead, a pair of khaki shorts, a black trader-store singlet trimmed in white, and a red woollen skiing cap made up his outfit. Not exactly

what I had expected a Kobolya town chief to wear, but his cordiality tempered my disappointment, and even before we reached the huts we were talking like old friends. I knew I was going to like him.

Kobolya is an old town and a famous spot in the Vai country. For many miles around you hear tales of it and of its first great chief, Mono Sando, who built there and ruled the surrounding forest. Tales of his wars and country-law decisions have been passed down for generations until, now, they have become legend among Vai people. Kobolya was his head village, the name coming from *Kolo-balieah*, which means "The barrels that ran away," a name it received from an event which just preceded the birth of the town.

Traders used to bring rum up from the coast with which to buy the native coffee and palm oil, and once, so the story goes, they unloaded many barrels from their surfboats at night. It was too dark to carry them into their mud warehouses that night, and so they left them on the shore expecting to put them away the next morning. That night a storm broke and when it was light they returned to find the river flowing high over its banks and the rum casks missing—washed away by the waves, the natives said. Mono Sando thought it an event to be remembered and so had built his court town there and named it—not without wit—for the traders' misfortune. It is said he later told them that for an equal amount of rum he would change all his towns' names.

The house to which Jah Gangah led us was large and beautiful. It was made of mud and thatch like the others in the village, but, unlike them, was bordered on two sides by an elevated arched porch. This set it off from the rest, lending a proper "town chief" look. Inside there were three large rooms; reed-covered beds in two of them, and in the third a long, low table on which were heaped great piles of fruit: bunches of bananas, coconuts, pineapples, oranges, limes and plantains. On the floor below they

had placed for us huge hampers of clean new rice, eggs, peanuts, avocados, sweet potatoes and yams, and a freshly killed leg of wild pig wrapped in green banana leaves.

I hadn't expected anything quite like this, and I quickly started to get out the now meagre-looking *dashes* that I had brought for the chief. Vahnee, however, stopped me by whispering that we should wait until night for that, so I thanked Jah Gangah again and he left, followed by the carriers. From a window, I could see him pointing out huts for them, and then he turned, his sporty red cap and white-bordered singlet disappearing in the dark at the far end of the town.

Soon there was a knock at the door and two pretty young girls balancing buckets of water on their heads entered the room. For a moment they talked with Vahnee, while they laughed shyly and peered at me out of the corner of their eyes. Vahnee said the chief had sent them with water for my bath, and told me to follow them and they would take me to his bathhouse.

They led me past firelit, mat-covered doors and around silent, smoke-filled huts until finally at the far end of the town we came to the "bathhouse." The place proved to be nothing more than a circle, about four feet in diameter, of shoulder-high thatch tied to poles which were driven down into the ground. It was open at the top, and the floor was covered with broken palm nuts—dreadfully cruel, I was soon to find, to tender, trek-tired feet. A small slippery plank lay in the centre with a sputtering oil-soaked torch thrust into the ground close by. I was slightly startled to see by its feeble flickering light the dusky faces of some thirty women—all ages and shapes—who stood about peering and waiting and grinning.

The two young water bearers passed through the narrow opening and I followed close behind. A little satisfied sigh went up from the gathering—the kind you hear in some theatres when the cattle-thieving villain walks into the final trap and you know that this time

he won't get out!—and I felt a small wave of uneasiness ripple along my body. Slowly the two young wives put down their water and, taking a step or two back, nodded to me and smiled.

"Thank you very much," I said and waited for them to go.

They grinned and remained standing where they were. The women on the outside pressed forward, their necks craning over the thatch sides of the wind-break—I had decided that was all it could be there for—and their eyes open wide and hopeful. I nodded again.

"Thank you very much for bringing the water. You can go now, all of you. Good-bye."

They just giggled and shook their heads! I was beginning to feel slightly uncomfortable. Perhaps they didn't understand. I decided to try my Vai.

"*Isseh! Isseh kah-kah! Tah, musieah! Tah!* (Thank you very much. Go, women! Go!)"

They all threw back their heads and laughed, then shook them in refusal. They were having a fine time.

Then an awful thought came to my mind. Perhaps this was some bush custom of which Vahnee had failed to tell me.

"Vahnee! Vahnee, come here!" I called.

This seemed to be more than the women could stand. They were falling all over one another laughing, and one, hopelessly doubled up, leaned against the fence. It broke and she fell face first into a bucket. I called again for Vahnee, but my voice was lost amid the laughter. This skit of mine was probably more than they had bargained for, and I was feeling a bigger fool with each second that passed. In desperation I thought maybe I could beat them at their own game.

Slowly I took off my shirt. The laughter stopped and the necks craned again. I swung around manikin-fashion so that all might see. "Aaah, beautiful!" they murmured, and thirty black heads nodded approvingly. Then I took off my shoes and socks while thirty plaited topknots bowed down to look at a pair of very

dirty feet. "Aaah, beautiful!" again, and I began to feel very vain. Then I took a step toward the remaining bucket of water, letting out a howl as I did, which set my audience off again. The crushed palm nuts were sharp as broken glass and, to my white-man feet, they felt like hot coals. I put on my shoes quickly, rolled up my shorts, and began to splash the water over my body. The thumbs-down "Oh-o-o-o!" which followed showed that I had not completely lost the day.

About the time this last howl was losing itself in the night I heard the sound of running feet, followed by a loud and welcomingly masculine voice, shouting in Vai. With disappointed faces the women acknowledged their defeat and in a great hurry fled away into the darkness.

Jah Gangah came running into the shifting circle of torch light. His broad grin didn't limit itself to his face, but slipped down his brown neck and ended somewhere under his singlet. For a while he did not speak but only stood and looked at me; the grin growing larger all the time. Finally he burst out laughing.

"Ah, women! They always want to see!" he said and sent for more hot water.

He had told his two young wives to take me to the bathhouse inside his own compound. They had decided on a game of their own and had taken me to theirs, letting the other women of the town in on the secret beforehand. Some of them, he said, had never seen a white man before.

After a large and varied bush supper, Vahnee and I sat on the porch of our house. The night was dark and the stars burned bright in its blackness. I watched the grey ribbons of smoke curl up an inch from the bowl of my pipe and then disappear in the dark above. A candle flickered on the ledge and I blew smoke at the flame and watched it swing nervously about in the moving, foglike shafts of grey air. The night was quiet, or so it seemed at first, but when I listened carefully there were many sounds. Mosquitoes buzzed and tree toads chirped in a swamp near by; a locust droned,

while some night bird far off in the trees called, then called again and was still. Above them all, a mellow dance drum throbbed. At first it was so far away I thought it was only some vague and distant thumping in my mind. And then it came nearer on the wind and I recognized its beat; pounding, rolling, muffled and rich like flowing oil, yet constant and steady as my pulse. I started to tap out the beat on the rail with my finger, but the wind changed and the weird distant throbbing was gone.

Presently he spoke.

"The chief—both chiefs—and all their wives and court will come soon," he said. "They will welcome you to the town and the forest, and, I think, they will give you a bush name. They will take you in and you won't be a stranger any more." He laughed, "Wait, you will see."

"What shall I do? I won't know what to say."

"You don't have to, Massah. I am your speaker. You will talk through me. Wait, they will come soon."

Half an hour passed. The candle had burned down and the end of its wick lay glowing in a hardened puddle of wax. I stood up and started to go in for another when, from the far end of the town, the deep hollow boom of a log drum sounded, and I saw torches passing in and out among the grey and ghostly huts. Vahnee had not moved, so I sat down again and waited. After a minute or two the torches came out into the open, and a long line of women, their cloths wrapped tightly around their bodies and fastened under their armpits, marched in slow procession toward us.

When the first in line, an old grey-haired woman with light skin and a calm, grandmotherly face, had reached the steps of the porch, I smiled and nodded at her.

"Pretend you don't see them, Massah. This is not the time to speak!" Vahnee whispered, and I felt foolish, for there were at least thirty standing silent and expressionless at the other end of the porch, and I found it impossible to pretend I didn't see them.

More were coming all the time, and finally, when there were about fifty grouped together, the procession ended and the drum stopped. They all stood looking off into space, their torches crackling and sputtering above their heads, while I, feeling definitely uncomfortable now, pulled out a cigarette and, lighting it, puffed and looked at my feet. Vahnee sat on his stool and looked back at them as though they were not there.

Soon, from the other end of the town, another drum began to beat. This time it was not the deep log boom, but the pecking, rattling tap of the *fanghas* or chiefs' war drums. Then more torches moved back and forth and the men's procession moved toward our silent and half-filled porch. As they came near and the light fell on their faces I saw that it was not Jah Gangah who led, but an older man with a very black, stern face.

He wore a long and beautifully embroidered country gown and from its sides and front bulged a pair of muscular arms and a powerful, hairy chest. His head was high and, as he glided in long graceful strides, he gave the appearance of one who was used to giving orders and having them obeyed. When he climbed the steps, followed by Gangah and the rest, the women all bowed, and as he walked forward to a place before Vahnee and me, one young woman stepped from the line and held a carved stool beneath him. Another woman placed a stool for Gangah and the rest of the men filed in on both sides leaving a little passage behind the two seated men, leading to the women.

During all the time it took them to get arranged Vahnee had sat in calm and unconcerned silence, but now that all was in order he straightened up, blinked his eyes and started to take some interest in things.

"The older man is Baimah Kahtumu," he whispered to me. "He is speaker for the paramount chief and has great power in this country. He comes from a different clan, but Sando Kahndahkai took him in and now he is head of all Mono Sando's old country. The

woman who walked first in line is his head wife and she, too, is very great in the country."

The *fangha* drum, which had continued beating all through the time that the men were coming, suddenly stopped and a hush fell over the porch. The chief and his speaker had also been talking together. But now they, too, stopped and turned their faces toward me. For a moment we looked at each other and then Kahtumu raised his hand and snapped his fingers several times. A young man walked out from the group and stood directly behind his stool. Without changing his expression or moving his head the chief began to talk. I could understand little of it, for he spoke in Vai, and as his smooth, deep voice rolled on I watched the faces of the men and women behind him. While he talked they were motionless, their eyes glued to the back of his head, but when he paused for breath, which was often, they would nod to one another saying, "*Ummm! Tonyah bele bele!* (Yes! It is very, very true!)"

When he had finished he snapped his fingers again, and his speaker stepped out in front of Vahnee. After a pause in which the gathering settled itself for another period of listening, he began to talk—also in Vai—and I could understand enough to know that he was repeating the same things that his chief had said, and perhaps adding a few of his own ideas to them. I was glad when he finished, for I was anxious to know what it was all about. I knew it must be very important: they were all very serious, and the speech had taken about fifteen minutes. Then Vahnee turned to me.

"The speaker says he is glad to see you."

My face must have dropped a little, for Vahnee quickly added, "Kahtumu says he is very glad to see you, and all his people are, too."

I still was not satisfied.

"Is that all he said?" I asked.

"Yes, but he told about his family, also."

"Well, tell him I'm glad to see him and tell him about my family, too." I thought I was being funny.

Vahnee nodded all too seriously and, before I could say what I really wanted to, stood up and walked to the place before the chief's speaker. For the next ten minutes Vahnee talked without a pause. And as he talked, I got more and more uncomfortable, for the people never took their eyes off me and those eyes seemed to grow bigger and shinier as everyone stared harder and harder. What on earth was Vahnee saying? When he had finally finished and the message was being relayed through the chief's speaker, I wasted no time in asking him.

"I told them you were glad to see them," he answered.

"But you couldn't take so much time just saying that. What else did you say?"

"I told them about your family, Massah."

"You don't know anything about my family!"

Vahnee nodded, "True, Massah, but they don't know I don't."

Meanwhile, the chief's speaker was talking rapidly and more excitedly while the chiefs and their people, their necks craning forward and their jaws hanging, looked awestruck and incredulous.

Suspiciously I turned to Vahnee. He was sitting back with mouth half open, a silly smile on his face.

"What is he saying now, Vahnee?" I asked.

Vahnee looked a little sheepish and pretended not to hear.

"Tell me what he's saying, Vahnee."

"He's telling about the elephant you killed alone in M'balomah, Massah."

"Elephant I killed! Massah Simmonds was with me, wasn't he? And besides it got away. Did you tell them that?"

Vahnee shook his head, and just then the speaker clapped his hands loudly and, with much movement of arms and eyes, uttered seven or eight mysterious words in a deep and ominous whisper. All the people cheered and Jah Gangah even jumped up and gleefully shook my hand for a second, then realizing that he

had forgotten his chiefly dignity sat down quickly and looked very serious for the rest of the evening.

As the speaker went on I turned to Vahnee again.

"What did he say that time, son?"

Vahnee was scratching his toe vigorously. He didn't look up, so I pinched him. Two wide and innocent eyes looked blankly into mine.

"He said you were the best elephant hunter in all the forest, Massah."

"And who told him that?"

Vahnee scratched his toe again.

"I did," he admitted.

Finally all the speeches were given, the more serious formalities were over and we settled down to have a good time. Kahtumu came over and shook my hand warmly, snapping my fingers many times and saying in quite good English that he was glad to have me in his country and hoped I would ask for anything I wanted. Then Gangah and the other sub-chiefs came up and each promised he would do for me all that I wished of him. All the time we talked the women and younger men of the town hung over the rail and stared at us and chuckled to themselves.

Presently a clean and freshly woven split bamboo mat was unrolled on the floor at our feet. It was time, Vahnee explained, for the chiefs to *dash* me and all *dashes* must, when given to an important chief, be offered on a new mat. Then the gifts were brought. A goat, an elephant tusk, two beautiful country cloths, a thick and exquisitely worked filigreed gold ring made by the village goldsmith, and a half-dozen hens with a pure-white rooster in their midst. All were laid on the mat. This last, I was told, was the most important one of a chief's or king's welcome gifts. The "*chicken dash*" symbolizes his heart. If there is a white one all is well; but if not you know the man's heart is not pleased with you, it is not white and pure where you are concerned. A black chicken means "get out." It can mean even more.

My *dashes* to them looked ridiculous next to theirs,

but they were pleased and Vahnee said I need not worry. They were several pounds in silver coin and two hunting knives for the chief, and sticks of trade tobacco, clay pipes and salt for the people. After these were handed out, the last ceremony began. It was an important one: that of giving me a name.

Dancing had begun and the men and women, led by Jah Gangah, had formed a long, snakelike line which wove in a slow rhythmic circle around the drums. There were six of these; two hollow-log drums beaten with thick sticks and four small leather-topped ones which the drummers pounded with incredibly rapid movements of their hands. The intricate rhythms and harmonies which the six men brought from their crude country "dance-makers" were amazingly beautiful and tremendously exciting.

The circle moved slowly and steadily closer and closer to the drums and the place before them where Vahnee and the chief and I stood. The beat grew louder and faster until finally, when the dancers were in a solid palpitating mass around us, Kahtumu lifted his hand suddenly and there was instant and intense silence. Then the chief's voice came; he had laid his hand upon my shoulder.

"*Kai ah tome 'Boung-Goom-Bah'!*" he shouted. "The man's name is '*The Hunter Who Shoots in the Head.*'"

The crowd roared and the chief spoke again.

"He shall always be known as Boung-Goom-Bah in our country and all men must give him what he asks. I make him my brother and you shall look upon him as you look on me."

The drums thundered out again and several men lifted me to their shoulders. They carried me into the large hut and then they were gone and the dancers moved on through the town. They were chanting; their voices came soft through the night and the drums pounded out their voices.

"*Boung-Goom-Bah! Boung-Goom-Bah!*"

"I hope so," I thought fervently, "I hope I'll be able to live up to my name."

I spent over a week in Kobolya and the villages around it. Then one evening when Vahnee and I were walking home from a day in the bush during which we had shot (at least so far as I knew) a new kind of monkey, we came upon fresh tracks of elephants. I had no idea there were any in that section of the bush, and the sight of the tracks was all I needed to want instantly to try out my new name.

Besides this I was greatly indebted to the two chiefs and their people, and since they needed meat, if I could bring them an elephant, it would be a perfect way to show them my appreciation.

There is no greater gift to an African village than a dead elephant or a dead mass of meat of any kind. The elephant ranks first because there is more of it. And almost none of it is wasted; *everything* is eaten but the teeth, the jawbone and skull, the end of the tail and the gristly soles of the feet. Even the bones are beaten up and boiled for their fat; the intestines—and what acres of them!—are, as the coast African says, “Sweet past all other meat!” And this was “the hungry time.” The rice crop had been poor. There was not enough even for their own food, to say nothing of supplies for trading on the coast for powder.

I knew too that it would be wise for me to hunt, for in Liberia the hunter is the big man. He gives the villages food, so he is respected as a chief. I wanted to know these people; I liked them and I wanted to be one of them. The best way to accomplish this was to shoot for them.

When Vahnee and I arrived in Kobolya that evening we called on Jah Gangah and I asked him for a hunter. He said that one of his had been killed several months before and that the other lived a day from the town, but that he would send for him in the morning. I got the gear together in several hours and then there was nothing to do but wait impatiently for the hunter.

The third morning Tuke-Bay-Tahmah arrived—Seahfah Tuke-Bay-Tahmah, and he was, with but one exception, the finest-looking native I saw in

Africa. He was over six feet tall as he stood barefoot, and must have weighed nearly 200 pounds, all hard, sleek muscle. His skin was the colour, and had the smooth texture, of a fine piece of mahogany. The name Tuke-Bay-Tahmah, like mine, was Mendi and meant "The Hunter Who Brings the Meat Close to the Village." Seahfah himself was Mendi, and the fact that I had a name from his country pleased him very much.

And so "Shoots in the Head" met "Brings the Meat Close to the Village," and, of course, the first topic discussed was guns. Seahfah immediately wanted to learn to shoot my *Kamah* gun himself. He wasn't satisfied by just seeing me do it. Since that was the case we decided to walk out to a stream beyond the town to try it.

Before we started, Seahfah presented me with a large gourd of palm wine. It was rather strong and he, being very proud of the fact, asked if in my country we had any drink as potent as that which he had made. I told him I thought we had and I sent Flumo, one of Vahnee's boys, into the house for some Scotch. I told him to pour out only a tiny bit in a glass, but, whether I used the wrong Mendi word for small or whether Flumo had ideas of his own, he returned with a tall, full glass of the stuff. I told him to go back and pour it out, but it was too late. Seahfah, evidently realizing that I thought he couldn't take it, jumped forward and, before I could make a move, drank the whole glass down as though it were tea. His eyes didn't even water! I thought Flumo had made a mistake, but when I looked at the bottle, I found it half empty. The man had drunk a half-pint of whisky.

I was about to call the shooting off—it didn't seem the best idea for him to play with a .405 in the condition that he should be in—when he asked for another glass of the "good heat," saying that the last one had been refreshing. I decided then we might as well go ahead and see how things turned out, so Seahfah gulped down another tumblerful. Thinking that he

would surely be staggering before we had got far along, I started with him toward the stream.

But nothing happened. All along the way I watched him, expecting at least a tumble or two, but he arrived at the place as sober as he had come to me, as far as I could see.

Then we started on the gun. I showed him every part, the sights, how to lift them and aim, how to load, the safety catches—everything. He watched attentively and said he understood. I threw a chip out into the water and on the second shot hit it. I was rather proud of myself; I felt I had done pretty well. Seahfah nodded gravely, praised my shooting and asked if he could try. Rather condescendingly, I'm afraid, I handed him the gun.

It was hard to get used to and besides he had a pint of whisky inside him. Though he hadn't shown any evidences of the liquor, I was sure his aim wouldn't be very good—I really wasn't worried about competition!

Three chips were thrown out on the moving water, and in one shot each, Seahfah blew them to bits. Then he picked out a branch in a tree across the stream and split it in two on the first shot. I didn't shoot again!

He knew as much about the gun as I did, and surely had handled it better. He looked as calm and collected as an old woman knitting. And I'd been worried about his capacity!

Suddenly he asked, "Have you shown me all about the great gun, Massah?"

I nodded.

"Every little thing I know now?" he continued. I thought I detected a faint tremor in his voice.

"You know as much about it as I do," I answered, wondering what was coming next.

"And you are sure—not some small thing you have forgotten?" he went on, and I knew the tremor was there. His eyes were going back in his head with each word and his mouth drooped down at the corners.

"Yes, I'm quite sure, Seahfah. Let's go back now."

He didn't seem to hear me. He opened his mouth again.

"Are—you—su——"

He never finished the word. He had slumped to the ground as "out" as they ever go. But he had put it off until he knew all about the gun.

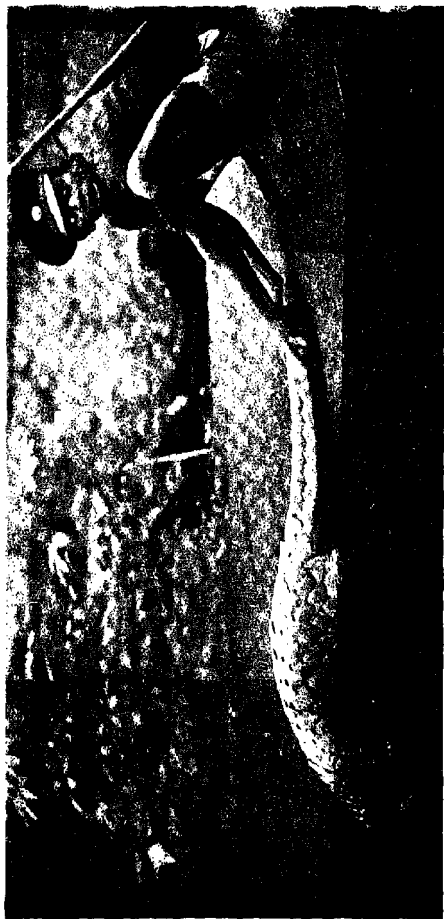
The next morning at four o'clock we started. There were five of us: Vahnee, Seahfah and a young tracker friend of his, Flumo, to carry the one box, and I. We pegged along at a good pace for two days, Seahfah setting it, and showing no ill effects from his night of "eagle dreams" as he classed them.

It had rained steadily from the time we had started out, though it was the period of the "middle drys." At this time of year there is normally a short dry spell which comes in the midst of the rainy season either in July or the first part of August. The rains usually begin in May, and last through October or November and the "middle drys" is supposed to be a time of some respite from the ceaseless downpour, but we found that it still could come down with a vengeance.

In a year a hundred and seventy-five inches or more of rain fall in Liberia and easily three-fourths of it comes during the rainy season. For days and weeks it falls in a steady, driving deluge that turns the towns to mires and swells the rivers into raging torrents. It's like plodding through a line of great, full-on fire hoses to trek through a tropical rain, for the force of the water seems to add ten pounds at least to your shoulders.

Two days of pushing that curtain of water before me had worn me out and I was wearily grateful when late in the afternoon of the second we came out of the forest into a broad, marshy field where we could see dimly the outlines of a cluster of huts. There were only five of them, and in the milky mist of the storm they looked sullen and waterlogged.

These five desolate-looking huts were all that were left of a once-great town ruled by Zogah, who had been, in the past, a great chief. But his town had been



Dr. Junge's head-boy, Massa, with giant ant-eater (giant manie) he shot

burned, he had lost his power and as he came through the dusk to meet us Zogah looked as old and decrepit as his gloomy village.

He took us into his own hut, which looked as though it would fall down around our ears at any moment, and we sat around the scanty fire while we talked and tried to dry out.

The wet season is best for deep bush hunting, for the rain, dripping steadily and gently through the thick interlacing of forest leaves, keeps the earth always soft enough to retain clearly the tracks of elephants. And so, even though I had a miserable cold and my first real touch of fever, we decided to go out the next morning and take advantage of the ideal conditions for tracking which the rainfall furnished.

Seahfah and Vahnee discussed the probable location of the herd with Zogah and then, with many whispers and mysterious side glances, Seahfah said he wanted to explain something to me. His powers, he said, were more than the ordinary hunter's, and one of the great tricks he knew was how to change himself into an elephant and mingle with the herd. His body would be beside me, he said, but his spirit would be out in the shape of an elephant, so I must not open fire until he told me at which animal to shoot. I might kill him, without knowing it, if I was overanxious and did not wait.

When he finished I started to laugh. He might be a pretty good hunter, I said, but he didn't have to tell that yarn to make me believe it. Zogah shook his head nervously.

"It is true, Massah," he said. "The words he speaks are not to be laughed at. Why, only two moons past a man was killed when he had changed himself into a bush cow and was wandering about near our village."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Don't tell me someone killed a bush cow and it turned out to be a man!"

Zogah nodded.

"Yes, and the man was Seahfah's best friend, and the only other hunter in our forest who knew the trick."

I looked at Seahfah. He was bent forward with a strange look on his face. His hand trembled a little as he reached for a coal to light his short clay pipe. Zogah's voice droned on.

"Ah, we were very sad that day, for Sayku was a great hunter and a good man to our people. He brought us much meat, and when he died the drums beat long and there was crying in the villages for seven suns. Seahfah was saddest of all, and for one whole moon he sat in his hut and would not speak. Sayku was his friend."

"How did it happen?" I asked. I spoke to Seahfah, but Zogah answered.

"He was coming in from the bush below the last hut." He pointed down the hill and Seahfah looked up a moment, then puffed his pipe and stared into the fire. "A bush cow ran from the swamp and started to come toward him. He shot and the animal fell."

The old chief leaned forward. His voice was a whisper and his eyes were bright and gleaming.

"When we looked we found it was a man. It was Sayku, and we knew Seahfah had told the truth, for bush-cow tracks led up to the place where he lay."

He stopped and we sat in silence. The rain dripped down from the thatch, and there was a cool, misty smell in the air. A chicken walked before the door. It was soaked and its feathers hung close to its back. It kept twisting its head as it walked along and water ran from its beak. Seahfah took the pipe from his mouth.

"It was true," he said. "For there were bush-cow hairs between his toes, and men can always tell a hunter's trick by that."

He stood up and walked to the door. The chief followed him, and as they went out I looked at Vahnee.

"Is it true?" I asked him.

Vahnee rubbed his forehead slowly. It was a moment before he spoke.

"Some hunters have strange powers, Massah," he answered. "Seahfah is said to be strong in jungle witchcraft."

He said no more and I looked through the door at the men as they moved away. Seahfah's broad back towered above the old man's head. The rain ran down it in little shifting streams like water going off a freshly tarred street.

Later, in the bush, I was to see many instances of hunters' belief that they can change themselves into other forms. One of the commonest of these related beliefs is that a hunter can "become one with a tree." Often I have seen a man, when in danger of being charged by an elephant or bush cow, run to a tree, throw both arms about it, hugging it closely, and close his eyes, standing quite motionless, believing himself to be invisible. As a matter of actual physical fact their colouring is so like the predominating colour of forest, which at the ground level is black and brown, not green, that a man in this position does achieve practical invisibility.

But there was more to it than that. Many times I saw Vahnee embrace a tree in this way when his mind was troubled, standing thus for long periods, and afterward seeming serene and strong, for, having become one with the tree, as he said, he had gained strength from it.

It was the next morning and the rain still fell. We were wet and cold, sitting on a rotten log in the middle of a jungle swamp. We had spent the night on the log and now each time I breathed it hurt down in my chest; in my ears was a sound like that made by a blowtorch going full blast. I threw my cigarette into the water and the grey end sizzled and turned black; the paper turned brown and it looked like any cigarette butt thrown in a city gutter on a rainy day. I wished it were a gutter, for then I could go to a

doctor and get some quinine for malaria—I could go to bed. Clean sheets . . . the crisp fresh smell of clean sheets and a pillow. Someone to say, "There now, fellow, you're all right. Go to sleep and you'll be O.K. when you wake up." Sleep . . . clean sheets . . . the smell of a house . . . Home! Why had I ever come to Africa? Just to lie down now and feel that good feeling that comes to your stomach when the weight is off your legs; just to say "Whew!" and then close my eyes.

But I couldn't. We were hours out in the swamp and there was not a dry place in ten miles—there wasn't a bed in eighty!

I was pulled out of my fog by a voice.

"Perhaps the trail will lead us near the town. It is not far from here, and then we can get some food before we go on."

Trail? Food? I was cold again and that sound was in my ears. The cigarette butt was swelled open and little strings of tobacco were floating in the water at my feet. They had an unhealthy colour. They made me sick at my stomach.

Seahfah had spoken and, sitting on the wet, spongy log beside me, he looked as warm and happy as a cat lying in the sun. The last twenty-four hours had made him look younger and sleeker than ever. He smiled.

"We will surely come up with the herd today, Massah."

"You might, Seahfah, but I don't think I will. I'm going back to the town with Vahnee now. You can have the big gun if you want to go on, but I'm finished with this hunt. Here, give me the shotgun."

"Ah, Massah, thank you." He paused and looked up. "I will take good care of it while you are gone. I will bring it to Kobolya when the hunt is over."

We left them, Vahnee and Flumo and I going back through the endless swamp toward the town; Seahfah and his tracker pushing on into the muck after elephants. The two swished off and the vines soon

smothered them from us. My head ached and was hot. I followed close behind Vahnee and Flumo.

We had stumbled along for six hours and were coming near the clearing. The ground was getting higher and not so hard to walk on. There was a faint smell of smoke in the air. Vahnee walked ahead with the gun and Flumo was back with me, his hand under my arm helping along when we came to boggy places. I was dizzy and spots danced before my eyes. The rain had stopped and the sun was out and whenever we came to bright places I put my hand before my face. The glaring light brought a dull ache far back in my head. It was a poor way to be coming back from a hunt—a hunt for food.

Suddenly there was a sound ahead of us, and Vahnee stopped dead in his tracks. We stopped, too; the noise was that of breaking twigs with the sucking swish of hoofs being pulled from soft mud. It was not very far ahead. Vahnee crept back to us slowly, the gun held ready in his hand.

"Bush cow," he whispered. "There are three of them in the thick patch of thorns beyond the big tree."

There was a moment of silence. I did not know quite what to say. Vahnee and Flumo looked at me strangely; there seemed only one thing to say.

"Shall we try for one?"

Vahnee just stared at me. He did not speak.

"Do you want me to shoot?" I whispered again.

"There are three, Massah," Vahnee answered.

"Is the shotgun heavy enough? There is only buckshot in it."

"If you go close, it is."

I rubbed my eyes. A low snort came from the thicket. Bush cow—the forest water buffalo, the fiercest beast in the bush—five loads of buckshot. Were they wet? Would they go off? We had been in the swamp a day and a half. The natives feared them more than elephants, their way of coming back, goring a man to shreds when he was down—even after he was dead!

"You and Flumo go back," I whispered. "I'll take a look. Get back—up a tree."

Vahnee handed me the gun and I took half a dozen steps forward. It was like walking on a rubber bath-room sponge—that bubbly, wet sound. I wondered if they could hear it. I gripped the gun tighter. They were moving about in the thicket. I stood by the big tree, looking beyond; I couldn't see a thing, only a thicket. At the far end something was moving.

Then suddenly they walked out into the open. The bull was in the lead with a cow and small calf behind. He was dark red and very thickly built. His horns were the length of my forearm—broad and gnarled at the base and black as a wet palm nut. They were pointed and swept out, curving in at his eyes. And what eyes! Bloodshot with flies all around them. His head was low and he kept twisting it nervously—like a dark range bull; only those horns, they made him different.

I lifted the gun and pushed the safety button. It clicked loud. I thought they would surely hear it. They walked on parallel to me twenty yards away. A perfect heart shot.

I fired. He seemed fairly to spring into the air. All three dashed off. I fired again. He stumbled a little. I threw the third shell into the chamber. It stuck. He was turning—coming back! I was frantic. The thing wouldn't go in and he was coming nearer, his head straight out and his horns curving back, glistening, black. He looked like a big fish shooting through the water with bubbles coming from its mouth. The gun was jammed. The shell had swelled. It wouldn't go in.

"Pull harder, Massah. Quick!"

I looked back. Vahnee was right behind me.

I jerked again and the shell slipped in. When I fired head-on the bush cow faltered, but kept coming. He was falling all over himself, his legs shooting wildly out at the side. The fourth shot brought him down—almost at our feet. Then he started to get up and for

the last shot the shell stuck completely. It wouldn't even come out of the chamber. It was warped tight. I threw down the gun and started to turn. The bull was half up. He was bellowing and blood poured from his nose and mouth. In a moment he would be up. Vahnee's voice came again. Calm . . . it was too calm!

"Your brother's hand gun! Use it!"

The pistol! I had forgotten about it entirely. Stan had given it to me. He had said, laughingly, that it might help. It did.

I fired all eight shots. The animal was dead, but I kept firing until the clip was empty. Then I walked up beside it and was deathly sick at my stomach. My knees buckled under me, and I leaned on its dark red back. It smelled just like an ordinary cow let into the barn after a summer shower.

Vahnee grinned.

"At least we know this one was not a witch!" I heard him say; then everything went black. I think I never even spoke my thanks aloud.

Three days later in Kobolya there was great rejoicing. Drums beat and the forest echoed with the sound of chanting voices. That morning the meat had been brought in and now it was night. Kahtumu and Gangah had called Vahnee and me to the big round hut in the centre of the town and when we arrived we found it packed with about forty people. Men, women and children of all ages were there, from an old grandmother who lay on her thatch-filled mud bed to young babies strapped on their mothers' backs. Everybody was smiling and excited; the firelight played on their faces and made them smooth brown masks that held black eyes and glistened with white, polished teeth.

As we entered the door they began to chant. The chief told me, as he led us to our stools by the fire, that it was their welcome song for the hunters returned safe from the hunt. They were singing thanks to the god of the forest. Their voices rolled and murmured

and their bodies swayed to the soft rhythm. It was a chant of worship, their prayer to the gods of the bush.

When the chant ended there was a moment of silence. Suddenly a young man, clad only in a loin-cloth, his body oiled and sparkling, leaped out of the shadows into the circle of light around the fire. Broad silver wristlets banded his arms and a string of leopards' teeth hung down loose from his neck. He was the story-teller, and as he told the long history of his people, Vahnee and Gangah translated a word here and there so I could follow him. His stories were of the rain and sun and harvests and of the great spirits who ruled them all. He told of terrible famines and hunts; of brave chiefs and hunters who in seasons past had died so that their people might have food. He sang of war and death—of plenty and of peace. And as he chanted he tapped a small drum lightly while the men clapped and moaned a deep accompaniment. They had heard these tales a thousand times—but as they swayed and bent far forward their eyes opened wide and gleaming; it was as though they heard them for the first time.

It went on for hours, and then suddenly a new story was begun.

The story was of a strange hunter who came from beyond the great salt river that flowed along the far edge of the Vai country. He had come into their town, and their chiefs had taken him in as a brother. He had shot for them—his gun spoke many times—only three suns ago he had killed and brought them food. A quick dart of pleasure went through my body; I was almost ridiculously pleased. When the story ended and the people filed from the hut, each bowed as he passed to murmur his word at parting.

"Isseh, Boun-g-Goom-Bah. Kahmbah mukie bay, way! (Thank you. May the great Spirit watch over you in the sleeping of the sun!)"

I sat alone in my hut. Grey-blue ribbons of smoke curled up from the coals of the fire to vanish in the

darkness of the thatch. I sat silent; I did not wish to move.

Kahtumu's voice came softly from the doorway, where he stood with Vahnee close beside him.

"And now I give you this, my brother. It shall speak more than our words. When you look upon it you will remember this night."

He held a long sword in his hand. The hilt was of carved ivory with bands of silver worked into it; bush-cow horn was inlaid along the ridges. It was old and hand-yellowed by time and use.

"It is the sword of Mahsahntah," he said, "and has come down through each ruler who followed him. All their power was in it—all mine is. It is my voice, and the one who has it in his hand, my chief. I give it to you. My people will always respect it."

I stood holding the sword without words. It felt soft and heavy like the happiness which was in my heart. What could I say to a gift like this, or to all that had happened during the past two hours which had filled me with delight and humility? There were no words in my language, no expression of gratitude which could convey the deep joy and thankfulness which I felt. Vahnee was silent, too, but he was looking at me as a teacher might look at a pupil of whom something special is expected, something he has learned—

And then I remembered and spoke haltingly in the soft words of the native whose heart is overflowing with happiness and humility and gratitude.

"*Isseh! Isseh! Um fah sah kumbah!* (Thank you! My heart lies down!)"

It was an expression I was to hear from native lips on many rare occasions in Liberia, and an emotion which I myself was to feel more often than I was to hear expressed.

It may seem as strange that Kahtumu should show me so much honour. But there was more behind it than the comparatively simple fact that I had shot a bush cow and given his people the meat.

I had met Kahtumu's son, Tonyah, at the mission and had talked with him at great length. Tonyah's name had been given him as a means of keeping him on earth. His mother had borne, and lost, two children before him, and when the third baby was born a solemn custom, often invoked in the interior in similar cases, was followed. With fitting rites the child was given the name Tonyah, which means "stay here." Thus a word which is thought to have the potency of a curse was used to fasten him to life so that he could not follow his two brothers to early death.

Perhaps this was the first thing which had interested me in him. When I came to know him I found much more. I talked to him freely and he learned that I came to Liberia wanting only to be a friend of the natives, to learn from them and to help them if there was any way that I could. Kahtumu and his people had encountered white people of only two classes—the traders who wanted to cheat them, and the missionaries who wanted to force an alien God on them. I wanted to do neither.

And so, when Tonyah learned that Vahnee and I were going into the bush, he sent runners to his father to tell him that I was coming, and Kahtumu, pleased by what his son had told him, and wanting, too, to have a mission and hospital established in his country, decided to use me as an emissary to the mission people and fête me in preparation for it. When I shot the bush cow he used that as an excuse to his people for doing me honour.

Yet there was no insincerity in what he did or what he said. The festival and the sword were not in any sense a bribe. And though I knew the things which were in his mind, they did not detract in any way from my happiness in what he had done and said. I walked to the door of the hut and looked away toward where Kahtumu was walking through the dark with silent stately tread.

"*Um fah sah kumbah,*" I whispered, and it was more than gratitude which my words carried.

Chapter VI

For days I had been waiting in Kobolya for a message from Seahfah. He had been on the trail ever since we had left him that feverish morning in the swamp. He had sent one message that a large herd of elephants was coming down from the north-east, and that when they crossed the river he would send word for us to come. Meanwhile I could only wait, while the hours and days passed like sick snails.

The sun rose slowly above the gentle fringe of palm trees and the night mist which had gathered about the hut roofs melted in the mellow light of dawn. A rooster, perched on the top ridge of the palaver house, flapped his wings and crowed hoarsely as though he had a cold in his throat. Then he flapped his wings again and flew noisily down to the ground by my feet. He looked at me, blinking his round eyes and twisting his head nervously from side to side. I didn't move, and he walked up close to my bare feet, where he started to scratch the cool earth. I leaned back against the wall of my hut, and he looked up again and blinked his eyes and ruffled his brown feathers.

The sun cleared the palm trees and hung, a thick, orange ball, in the east. The sky grew brighter and a reddish shaft of light fell across my legs. The rooster blinked and looked into the sun, then he glanced at me once more.

"The sun is up," he crowed. "The sun is up."

From the far end of the town there came a sleepy answer. Then suddenly, from all the huts about, wings started flapping and chickens flew down to the ground. They scratched the damp dust and pecked at unseen bugs. The sun rose above the rim of green and the whole sky smouldered with warmth.

From the hut facing mine came sounds of life, and in a moment a man pulled the mat from before the door. He blinked into the sun and yawned, then he scratched his woolly head and squinted his eyes and smiled. A skinny cur walked stiffly from between his legs. It looked into the orange ball, too, and blinked; it stretched lazily and started after a flea with a sudden burst of life. Then trotting out into the open it found a convenient house-corner and acted just like any civilized dog. The man yawned again and rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand.

A woman, dressed briefly in a beaded loincloth, instead of the more elaborate short beaded apron which native Liberian women wear when they dress up, came out with a hollow gourd balanced on her head and started toward the river for water. Behind her was a naked child with a smaller gourd. A brightly coloured butterfly lighted on my toe and flexed its wings slowly in the warmth. Then it flew into the air, and with other soaring spots of colour fluttered in jagged circles around the pointed hut tops.

The women and children filed back from the river, their bodies wet and shiny and beads of water glistening in their hair. The men followed them out to the bathhouses, and the sound of splashing was mixed with the low-voiced chatter of dawn. A band of monkeys croaked from the vines behind the hut and a little breeze stirred in the bush by the river. It was a gentle breeze, and brought with it the rich, fresh smell of the jungle; rotting leaves, thick climbing undergrowth, and a faint, sweet perfume of flowers. From Gangah's compound the deep morning chant of

Mohammedan prayer drifted gently and softly like a murmur.

Kahtumu was a Mohammedan, so all of his town was also. Here, as throughout Liberia, is striking evidence of the eclecticism of the native African. For while he can, and often does, accept all the forms and rules of Mohammedanism, following its laws rigidly, paying as strict attention to its tabus as to those which he inherited from his fathers, he also follows the old tabus and other laws of the old religion, remaining strangely pagan, even though having become Mohammedan. Even while keeping Mohammedan fasts he will rigorously propitiate his native gods. More than once I have seen a native uttering Mohammedan prayers in the morning and taking food to the grave of a dead brother (buried at the side of the doorway to the hut) and have heard the same voice which pleaded with Allah in the morning pleading at dusk with the dead brother to sleep quietly and not disturb his friends that night.

The sun rose higher and the whole sky was streaked with soft light. It was morning—a jungle morning—and the forest had awakened to the dawn. I stretched my legs into the bright shafts of warm sunlight and looked impatiently along the trail that came in from the forest to the east of the village. Seahfah's runner should have come the night before.

And then I saw him running smoothly and quickly toward me. His evenly flowing muscles moved easily, as if without effort, although he was streaked with sweat and his face was grey and tired. I jumped up and he called to me.

"Seahfah has found them," he panted. "He says to come at once."

"Are they far?" I asked.

"Not very far," he answered. "They are near Jah-Bo-La. We will be there before the sun is asleep. But we must hurry!"

"You won't be able to go," I protested. "You're too tired. You must have run all night."

The runner nodded.

"Yes, *Mahsahgie*, I have come through the night, but I am not tired. We will eat quickly, then go on. Seahfah will not wait long for us."

We went into the house and ate a hurried breakfast while Vahnee got together my automatic, a water flask, cigarettes, and some silver. Seahfah had my gun. In ten minutes the three of us were off.

The sun was well into the sky and the forest steaming with the muggy morning mist of rain season as we entered it. An hour out I was soaked and my shorts stuck to my legs like a wet sheet. Sweat dripped down from my hair into my eyes, and my helmet, the curse of bush trekking, grew heavier and heavier until I felt I had an iron bucket on my head. The runner trotted steadily ahead, and Vahnee's slim brown legs rose and fell monotonously before my trail-bent eyes. I tried to think of nothing, to make my mind a blank, but always at such times pictures of snowy, wind-streaked mountain peaks would flash splotchily before my face. I could not erase the image, though I tried, for it made the drops of sweat rolling down my chest and back like warm, gummy streams of oil, only harder to bear. It was like running through an endless, winding, slippery Turkish bath.

At Mombu we took a short rest, and a kind chief *dashed* us some oranges. I was hungry and they filled a small hole, but an hour on and my stomach felt empty again.

At another little village we made a second stop. There were no oranges here, and the green bananas we were given made sharp little pains shoot through my stomach. My head ached dully from the sun.

"How far from here, son?" I asked the boy, who looked fresher than he had when he came into Kobolya after his all-night run.

"Oh, very, very far, *Mahsahgie*," he answered, smiling up from the place where he squatted on the floor before me. It had been "not very far" from Kobolya, but now, six hours later, it was "very, very far"!

At five-thirty we were coming near the town. The sun was going down and the forest was friendly and cool as it always was in the early morning and at dusk. Only half an hour more and we would be there—just in time for a good bush dinner, chicken, rice, roast cassava and plantain—a cool bath to boot. Then a long talk with Seahfah. The day really hadn't been so bad, but I was glad to have it over, for I realized that I was thoroughly tired and painfully stiff. I looked at my watch. Ten after six; that made about eleven and a half hours on the trail.

When we reached the town, Vahnee and I went into the palaver house and waited for the chief and Seahfah. The runner went off to get them, but he was back almost before we were settled. He was alone. I swallowed and waited for him to talk.

"Seahfah has gone on, *Mahsahgie*." He paused and blinked. "To his hunters' camp in the upper Taywah bush. He says to come fast."

I swallowed again; I could scarcely get the question out, but said, "How far?"

"Not too far," the boy answered.

How far was that, I wondered? If "not very far," followed six hours later by a "very, very far," meant between eleven and twelve hours, what would "not too far" mean?

It was almost dark. I sat stiffly, and thought a few minutes. We might stay here; go on in the morning . . . but then the hunt . . . I got slowly to my feet.

Vahnee borrowed a lantern, the runner got an armful of palm oil torches, and we started. My legs! They were so stiff after the short rest I could hardly move them. They felt like two Charley horses, and my stomach grumbled like an ill-tempered camel. The trail was overgrown and rough and wound back east into the first hills of the lower Gola country. We walked on, and the bush was dark and ghostly; it sent back flickering shadows and, as we moved along, it seemed to sink down slowly upon us and our jagged circle of leaping yellow light. We didn't speak and

the forest was strangely silent; the only sounds were the sputtering of the torch and the swish of leaves and the soft, muffled pad of our feet.

Two hours out we came to a small river. It was over its banks from the recent rains, and a rotting grapevine bridge was the only way across. I was doubtful about its strength and not anxious to fall into the river—there were all too evident signs of crocodile having recently dragged themselves into the water from our bank. But Vahnee pointed out two freshly cut palm fronds crossed below the great tree from which the bridge was swung and said it was a sign from Seahfah that the bridge was all right. So the runner climbed up the rude ladder and, torch held high, slowly felt his way across to the far bank. I was next. Clutching a torch unsteadily, I climbed the ladder, too, and started after him.

Even a newly made bush suspension bridge, crossed in the daytime, is bad enough, for it is nothing more than a catwalk of rattan and thick vines woven together and swung precariously from the trunk of one tree to the trunk of another on the opposite bank—but to navigate an old one, rotting and filled with bug-a-bugs and ants, was mad. I thought so as I started up the ladder, but was sure of it when I was halfway across.

Holding on to the torch with my right hand and the flimsy rail vine with my left, I got out into the middle with the oily-looking water shimmering blackly below and the bridge creaking and swinging dizzily with each breathless step that I took. Up to this point the walk had been down, but now the arc swung up and the going was more difficult. I had taken about three faltering steps when, suddenly, from somewhere ahead in the dark there was a sharp rustle of leaves and a loud thump which made the bridge shake and squeak wildly. Then into the shifting light an animal darted; it was coming fast and straight for me and it looked like a leopard.

The next five seconds came and went with that



View of the market place at Bolahun. Iron money can be seen
in the hands of the man at the left centre of the picture

combination of lightning-like speed and wormish slowness peculiar to all moments of terror. How that animal managed it, I still can't figure out, but with one hissing yap he darted past me—almost through me!—like a small, angry switch engine. There was a clattering behind, and I turned to see Vahnee's head, haloed by the torch, peering wide-eyed over the down path of the bridge. Then I heard him cry, "*Ai Kum-bah!*" a Mendi appeal to God, and he disappeared. Later I learned that he had simply got out of the way in the hope that the beast would have room enough to continue across the bridge and would not turn, fearing him, and come back in my direction. But as it happened I felt suddenly deserted and alone, and as the cat, not accepting Vahnee's courteous invitation to pass, turned and started back toward me, I was terrified.

With a cry of fear I brought the torch down on its head with all the force I could command. Yowling hideously, it tumbled off and into the surging water below. I could hear it churning around below me and then, to make my own fright complete, one of my feet went through the rotten rattan of the bridge and, as I struggled, clinging wildly to a huge vine, I saw that the oil from my torch had soaked a part of the bridge. It was burning beneath me! I think that I have never made a more rapid or more light-footed advance than I did over the rest of that bridge!

A few minutes later, when the oil burned out and Vahnee came across, I felt rather silly. He was chuckling and paid about as much attention to the broken and burned part of the bridge as he would to a rut in a well-worn trail. He and the runner seemed to think the whole thing a good joke, for my ferocious leopard had been only a poor scared little tree-cat.

By eleven o'clock we had come to Seahfah's bush camp—two nicely-made open-sided thatch shelters—and by eleven-fifteen I had eaten a chicken, a large bowl of rice and something else which I thought was especially good; later I learned that it was a piece of

fried python, killed that afternoon. By eleven-sixteen I was asleep. Even their talk of elephants couldn't keep my eyes open. Vahnee, I think, was a bit ashamed of me. He told me the next morning that even the runner had sat up until the first signs of dawn, swapping stories with them. I was soon to learn that hunters never sleep. If they do, they must go off by themselves, for I have never caught one at it.

By five the next morning we were up and on the trail. Surprisingly I felt quite fresh with only a slight stiffness to remind me of the miles I had come. And even this was gone in an hour. We were following no trails, but Seahfah led us due east; he explained that a herd had swung down from the interior and would surely cross a river which lay not far ahead of us. In a short time we reached the river—probably the same one we had crossed the night before—and two hours of skirting its banks brought us to the marks we were looking for.

Some time during the night a herd of fourteen elephants had crossed to our side and, browsing along slowly, were swinging back east into the hinterland. The trail was fresh and easy to follow; we tracked fast, and by noon the droppings showed that they were not far ahead of us. Half an hour more of cautious steps brought us down into a valley of thick undergrowth, and here Seahfah held up his hand and stopped to listen. I heard nothing but the usual sounds, but Vahnee and Seahfah must have heard more, for they had a whispered conversation, after which Seahfah slipped his spear down into his gun and glided off into the bush, creeping like a cat. We waited, listening, and hearing our hearts pound dully in our ears while the seconds slunk slowly past.

Elephants usually keep on the move through the night and morning, resting only for several hours during the worst heat of the day. This comes between twelve and three, and they go, almost always, into very thick bush where they rest and flap the flies away and sleep. The cows with their calves and the big herd

bull mill about in the centre of the place they have chosen, while the young bulls stand sentinel in a spoke-like formation anywhere from twenty to a hundred yards from them. When they are alarmed the bulls charge in and there is hell to pay if you are caught between them and the herd. Calves were in this herd, and since they had chosen a dense spot I could only guess that the young bulls were spread out in formation. If they were, I didn't look forward to getting between them and the main group.

When Seahfah came back after what seemed hours, he said he had not seen the elephants, but had heard them down in a clump of thicket to the right of us. They were resting. We told the others to wait and I took a final look at my gun and followed Seahfah into the bush.

For ten minutes we crawled along through thick low jungle growth which was almost impregnable. We could see scarcely an arm's length ahead and the vines hung down from above like a ragged, gloom-smear'd tent-fly.

We had covered about three hundred yards when Seahfah stopped suddenly and pointed to his ear to indicate that he heard something. From ahead, I couldn't tell how far, there came a faint rumbling. The elephants were close; they were not startled; their bellies always rumble when they feed or doze and are not alert. Then, as we started on again, there was a crash followed by a leafy swish as a branch was ripped down somewhere in front of us. A moment of silence, then another crash—this time from behind, close behind and a little to the side! Another moment of silence—the rumbling had stopped—then a brushing of leaves as a heavy body pushed through them toward us.

I looked toward the place from which the sound came, but could see nothing. As I turned back to Seahfah my heart gave a little jump and seemed to stop beating for a moment. He was gone. The whole bush seemed alive with sound now and leaves were

swishing on all sides. Cautiously, my head itching and my hands slippery with sweat, I crept ahead. The gun was cocked and ready.

But still I could see nothing. The leaves were quiet again and the whole forest seemed silent. Ahead I could make out, near the ground, the rough, black trunk of a tree. I started toward it; there is security in a tree; something to lean against—something to get behind! I was almost to it, only a few feet away, when something clutched at my shoulder from behind. I was so frightened that the cry I could feel in my throat made no sound, and as I swung round I saw Vahnee kneeling there, pointing frantically toward the trunk of the tree. His eyes were big as lemons, and he shook his head like a terrier with a rat. As I got my breath, still too numb to move, the whole jungle seemed to crash down on us.

From the side a shot roared out, and as it did the "tree trunk" took a quick and angry step. It was the back leg of an elephant which thundered past us almost close enough to touch. There was no time to shoot—no spot to shoot at!—and Vahnee jerked me aside just in time. The elephant crashed on, and we, running at right angles, came into a low patch of bush where the vines were not so thick. Here we could see a hundred or more feet in every direction. It was a safer spot, for at least we could know what was happening and get a look at anything coming toward us, but I felt naked in it after the dark seclusion of the place we had come from. In the next sixty seconds I lived six months.

The noise of the stampeding herd was all around us. Branches snapped, limbs crashed and the shrill trumpeting and squealing of the frightened animals filled the heavy air with terrifying sounds.

No sooner had that one elephant gone off than, from the place where we had been before, three burst out through the leaves, pacing shoulder to shoulder, trunks lashing and ears flapping loose like great discs. The two on the outside were holding the middle one

up, but as they came on his head swung out from the others, offering a good head shot, and Vahnee yelled to fire. I did and he slumped forward, the others going on. He lay there quivering, his legs buckled under him and his tusks thrust down into the soft, leafy earth. From his right side the end of a spear-shaft stuck. Seahfah's shot had told.

The sun was setting and Vahnee and I stood on a high hill and looked to the east toward sun-softened, purple-veiled mountains. The dusk was cool and mellow. Far off a distant drum throbbed; a new drum, deep and mysterious; a drum farther on . . . from the east . . . from the back country. A voice unknown, unseen . . .

I turned to Vahnee. "Where does it come from?" I asked.

"From Binda-Jah," he answered.

"And where is Binda-Jah?"

He rubbed his chin and looked up at me.

"It is beyond, Massah. It is in the lower Gola mountains."

"And beyond that?" I asked.

"It is Kongbah, Massah," he answered. "It is not good to go beyond."

Below us in the camp, Seahfah, the runner, and the other hunter were sitting beside their fire smoking. The women from the village would come out to cut the meat the next day. The smell of burning wood came up on the breeze. The buzz of near-night rose from the stillness about us. I looked off into the mountains again.

I thought of a dream I'd had when I was a little boy. I had been walking alone in endless space while stars darted all around me and the sky stretched interminably away from me. Then suddenly I had come to a wall with an old white-bearded man sitting there, holding a sign in his hand. I spelled out the big words "END OF THE WORLD," and I knew that the man was God. I started to cry: I couldn't believe

it. I pulled myself up on the wall beside God and looked over his shoulder and then I laughed, for I knew it was a joke. There was no end; beyond the wall, mountains jutted up and rolled on and on for ever. God smiled and patted me on the shoulder. I walked out into the mountains and I was happy.

First it had been Cape Mount and those days on the coast. Everything had been new and wonderful. And then it had ceased being new and I had gone on, lured by a vision of the interior, by the places which were so wild that white men seldom went there, and by places even beyond these—by the haunted forest, of which I had heard whispers and intimations and against which I had been warned. And next it was Kobolya. That was wilder, and it was in the real bush and more things were strange and unseen. But I saw them and knew them and they had grown old. And now I heard the sound of a distant drum and heard the name of a new town and saw strange mountains purple in the sunset.

Another valley to cross . . . another people to know . . . another rising range to look behind . . . and beyond it all—the haunted forest.

Chapter VII

THUS it was that we went to Binda-Jah, reaching it on the evening of the next day. We arrived just before dusk and, after the usual *dashing* ceremonies, Vahnee and I went out into the town to shoot hawks. By dark we had killed seven and the townspeople were jubilant. Next to hunting an elephant for them there is no better way to get into their good graces. They have never heard of shotguns, and to see a bird brought down on the wing is nothing short of magic to them. When the bird is a *gaay*—an African chicken hawk, which accounts for six out of every ten baby chicks in a brood—it is a sign for rejoicing; a signal for drums and chanting and the dance. It never fails. It is the perfect bush letter of introduction, the firm foundation of friendship and trust.

The chief of the tribe, Boima Que, was a grand old man, a man whom I was to love and respect and a man who one day was to tell me the secret of Kongbah—the story of the haunted forest. He was big and fat, and he smelled of mildewed grass. He had a voice that was low and came up like deep bubbles in water; when he was excited it crackled like a prairie fire fanned by a strong west wind. He was always chuckling and his black eyes danced and sparkled. But he could be serious, too. Was he not ruler of half the lower Gola country and did not his uncle, the great

King Dahndai, whom I was also to know, make him his favourite son and heir to the great lower forests? Had not he alone started the Gola war! Yes, Boima Que could do more than chuckle while his eyes snapped fire at the sun. He was a great chief and leader. In the bush a chief, to stay one, must be smarter than all his other men. And Boima Que was.

While we sat around the fire that first evening with him, Boima Que told us about the curse of his village: a large eagle which lived in a high cotton tree not far to the south of the town. As long as the people could remember the same eagle had nested and lived in that tree. Every day or so it would soar over to take something from the town: a chicken, a goat or kid, and sometimes even a dog. The chief said once he had seen it lift a half-grown bush buck from the valley below and carry it, kicking, off to the nest, where it beat it to death with its beak. Countless times his hunters had gone out to shoot it, but they always came back empty-handed. The bird had a charmed life, it was only a waste of their powder to try, and the old people said the eagle could never be killed.

I felt pretty sure of myself after the hawk-shooting demonstration, so I immediately told Boima Que that all his troubles were over, he wouldn't have to be bothered by the pest much longer. I would shoot the eagle in the morning.

The chief thanked me and said he was very grateful but that, frankly, he didn't think I could do it; the eagle was charmed.

"Charmed! What is charmed to me?" I blustered loudly. And carried away by my own ridiculous bravado, I convinced them that I was practically the world's best shot, and prepared the way for what almost turned out to be the bitterest humiliation of my life.

So in the morning Vahnee and I, followed by most of the town, trooped out to the place and found it all as they had said. The eagle was tremendous; he sat

on the high limb of the cotton tree, and on the ground below the nest was a pile of sun-bleached bones. I had brought a shotgun and the light elephant rifle. One shot from the former showed me that it would be of no use. The shot was very small and the limb well over two hundred feet in the air. From where we had to stand to see the bird the load made about as much impression on him as a gentle patter of rain. He didn't even ruffle a wing!

I had thirteen cartridges for the German gun, and the first eleven brought only leering head-turns from my quarry. The twelfth time I did not even shoot at the bird. I shot a palm nut fifty paces to test the sights. The nut shattered—the sights were O.K. Something was queer. My thirteenth, and I aimed with all my heart!

The eagle merely ruffled his wings and soared out over us. We followed him with our heads. He glided over the town, then back to the branch and, perching again, gave us another disdainful look, then stared out ahead as though we were not there and the gun had never spoken. I looked at Vahnee; he looked down at his bare feet and said nothing. I turned to the gathering of Gola men and women and children, and they met my gaze with cold, expressionless faces.

"You see, White Man, the bird's power is stronger even than yours," the chief said, and then he turned and, followed by his people, started slowly toward the town. As we walked behind them in moody silence, I felt ridiculous and I knew I'd lost face badly with Boima Que.

Vahnee disappeared soon after we got back to the hut, and I didn't see him again until late afternoon. When he turned up he was followed by the whole town. The chief, with as many as could squeeze into the large round house, filed in while the rest gathered on the outside, peering through the broad, open windows. Vahnee, wreathed in smiles, told his story. When he finished I shuddered. He had taken bets with everyone in the town that I would kill the bird with

the next shot fired. The bets ranged from an orange or banana at six-to-one odds with the children, on up through silver bracelets, country cloths, spears, and woven hammocks with the men, and ended with three cows at two-to-one odds wagered with the chief. Vahnee had given the odds! He had mortgaged about everything he owned. When I got him over to the side and asked, as calmly as I could, what on earth he expected me to shoot the bird with, he smiled calmly and picked up my old Winchester .22.

I took it from his hands and a warm nostalgia swept through me as my fingers caressed its stock and barrel. I could see again the schoolroom in Glendale, Ohio, where I used to sit with it across my knees while my hands turned the pages of my geography until I found a map of Africa. I could taste again the beans my father and two brothers and I used to eat in the kitchen as we sat solemnly in a circle, our guns on our laps. I felt again the childish exaltation I had known on my fifth birthday when father had given me the gun. It had been such a good friend for so long! Dare I ask it to do this job for me?

We walked toward the cotton tree. The villagers followed behind and the swish of feet and of cloth against cloth was the only sound that we heard. I kept glancing down at the gun, in love and doubt. I was a little angry, too. It seemed unfair to ask it to do what both the shotgun and the elephant rifle had failed to do, and thus run the risk of casting unmerited discredit on it.

The eagle was perched on the limb and, after giving us one scornful glance, he stared sphinxlike into the forest. Chief Boima and his people arched back in a semicircle behind us, and they were very quiet—too quiet. Vahnee handed me a bullet. It was a "short," but that was all we had. I slipped it into the chamber and threw back the hammer. I aimed carefully toward the head, but in the old open sights the whole bird was in the "V." I started to squeeze the trigger . . . careful, this means a lot. Three-to-one odds

. . . six-to-one odds . . . two-to-one odds—oranges . . . goats . . . cows. . . . But that's only a small part of it! Careful, make sure. New people . . . a name . . . big words about what you can do. This means everything with them . . . everything, here, to us. . . . God, the whole darn tree's in the sight!

I lowered the gun. There was a murmur behind me. I looked back at them. They did not seem to see me. Boima rubbed his chin with his right forefinger. The nail was deformed and a bright scar ran back along his hand. A sword cut? Ah, yes, the Gola war. . . . Steady, now . . . this is a poor time to get nervous.

"The bullet will drop a little. Shoot above the head. He will fall." It was Vahnee, whispering, supporting me with his words.

"Oh sure, Vahnee, of course. There's no doubt of it. Just trying to make this look hard."

Oh, I am, am I? Well, get it over. About three inches above. That ought to do it.

I aimed the gun again. Above the head; three inches. I fired. I heard the bullet hit—it hit something. But nothing happened. A voice behind me laughed. I looked at the eagle. He had not moved a feather. And then suddenly he was falling forward; he hung by one foot; he fell! It must have got the head. A clean head shot!

Behind they had burst into a wild bush cheer. "*Ohaah-ooo! Ohaaah-oooooooo! Ay, BounG-Goom-Bah! You shootooo! Oh, God, you shoot!*" The chief took my hand. He shook it and slapped my back. Everyone laughed . . . everyone shook my hand. They shook Vahnee's, and we all laughed. They brought the bird over. He was immense—his spread over seven feet. They laughed. *Ohaaah-ooo!* It was as though they had won the bet. I looked at the old Winchester and my eyes were moist. You're O.K., I thought, you're a darned swell gun!

The two months spent with Chief Boima and the people of his country and the forests above it were

among the happiest I have ever known. There was not the glamour and reckless thrill that was to come with Kongbah, and there was not the empty, aching loneliness that came when I finally left those far mountains. But there was something—some unworded happiness and content—that I felt there always.

Several days after the eagle incident the chief called all his sub-chiefs and big men from other towns together for a bush palaver in which he, as a gesture of friendship which the shooting certainly didn't warrant, turned his country over to me and, presenting a beautiful silver and carved ivory cane—his *Mahnjah* and the symbol of his power—told his men that while I remained in their forests they must look upon me as their chief and respect my wishes as they would his own. Each chief in turn then gave a *dash* himself: silver snuff-horns and bracelets, country cloths, rings and spears, which I accepted by returning an equally prized *dash* to them. Mine, as usual, consisted of bags of salt, sticks of tobacco, cutlasses, trinkets and silver. When the ceremony was over and we had all snapped fingers to seal it, we walked out from the chief's compound to start a state inspection tour of the villages, "half-towns," and farms around Binda-Jah. But we never really got started on that inspection.

We were in the middle of the town, heading toward the western entrance, when, from behind us, a cry went up which brought all our heads about with a snap. At first I saw nothing but men, women and children running in and out among the huts, waving their arms and shouting for all they were worth. Then, looking off toward the eastern mountains, I saw what caused the commotion. It was a thick black cloud, and it hung low in the sky; it was coming fast toward us. It cast a menacing shadow on the soft, rippling roll of treetops, and the sun was blotted from the sky above them. It was a swarm of locusts, and it covered the eastern sky as far as the eye could see.

The chiefs had run back, and the town was in an

uproar. People carrying blankets and buckets and burning torches had gathered at the outer rim of huts and now stood quietly, staring up into the sky. A stillness had fallen suddenly, and as it fell I heard a dull droning sound which grew louder and louder until it became a windy, buzzing roar. Then the sun lost its brilliance and was smothered out entirely; the locusts descended on us and the shouting started again.

Locusts look and act just like large grasshoppers, and as the dry season was beginning and the rice harvested they had come too late to do any great damage. The only worry the people had was for their little gardens in the town itself. This worry did not last long, for before two hours had passed there was nothing left of them but bare, stripped corn and sugar-cane stalks, and little stumps where green vegetables had been. Fan with the cloths as they might and wave the torches and yell as they did, it made no impression whatever on the ravenous locusts. They ate everything, and then the still hungry ones went on, leaving eight or ten million in the town to get any bit of tender green they might have left. The main drive must have been miles long, for at dusk stragglers were still circling past, and we could hear them long into the night.

Aside from the fact that they did do some harm, their coming had its good points, for it gave the people a supply of rather unusual food for countless days to come. I tried a meal of them and must admit that I was not over-impressed, but the boys, together with all the rest of the town and countryside, waded into them with a relish not only remarkable, but astounding, too! Great bucketfuls were caught and, after their wings had been pulled off, dumped into boiling pots of palm oil, where they were stirred round until they became a thick, pasty mass. As such they were eaten or, at times, spread over rice as a *soupe*. The children spent days catching and stringing them on homemade thread, after which they were hung over smoky fires to dry and then put aside for future feasting.

The advent of the locusts is associated in my mind

with a beautiful friendship with a fair female, Pageh by name, who was with me continually from the day that the sun was darkened until a day weeks later when the sun was darkened again; but this time not by locusts. *Pageh* in the Buzi language means "beautiful." Flumo and the other Buzi boys gave her the name. She was, without a doubt, beautiful in her own way; she was a baby mongoose.

The evening that the first pots of—I suppose it might be called—"grasshopper jam" were being sniffed and tasted prior to being stuffed down hungry throats, the chief came into my hut with a little squeaking brown ball of fur about three inches long, which tapered off into another three inches of tail. It was a tree mongoose, he said. One of his men had found a nest in a hollow tree and had brought this one in alive as a *dash* for the chief. Boima handed her over to me and from that day on our life together, though much too short, was happy in every respect.

The name mongoose, I find, comes from the Indian, but the "goose" part might well come from English, for it describes the sounds she made perfectly. When she was hungry or angry at something she would peep steadily like a lonesome little gosling, and when she was satisfied she showed it by letting deep, hissing quacks come from a throat so tiny I often wondered how the sound came out without taking her black beadlike nose along with it.

She was less than a month old, so at first I fed her on powdered milk mixed with warm water, from the end of a cotton-wrapped matchstick. About six drops filled her tummy. Always after the meal was over she would climb up on my shoulder, look around for a moment sniffing the air and blinking her sharp black eyes, then, satisfied that the coast was clear, crawl down into my shirt pocket and go to sleep. Sometimes she would peep for a little while first, and I would rub her pointed nose with my finger, until the peeping stopped and a contented little sigh came in its place, then silence.

When she was big enough to scurry about the hut, she discovered she was fond of locusts, and with the discovery a new noise was born. This was a low, fierce, sneezy growl, which she used only on her new food. When a locust was dropped down in front of her she would crouch, then with a growl spring forward and, placing her two feet firmly on the fluttering insect's back, pull off its head with one quick twist of her jaws. The head was the only part she ate, but as long as there was any life left in the body she would clutch it and, growling as fiercely as anything six inches long can, stand her ground until the last lurch was over.

When Pageh and I had lived together for two weeks, we had another *dash* given us in the form of a second mongoose; this one didn't even have its eyes open. After feeding the new fellow I put him on the floor so that Pageh could welcome her new brother. But there was no sisterly love in Pageh's heart; she was on him in a flash. Growling like a cat with a mouse, she shook him for all she was worth. I slapped her and she skidded across the room, but as soon as she gained her feet she was back again mauling him. Small as she was her brown, furry body towered above his thin little one, and the commotion that came from their encounter was worthy of animals ten times their size.

A new and serious problem had presented itself. If I held Pageh the baby peeped, and if I held the baby Pageh peeped. When I held them both the two of them peeped and growled; the din was terrific. When Vahnee came in I put the problem up to him. As usual his advice was good: "Put them together and let them work it out themselves," he said, and dropped them both inside my helmet. Then the din began again.

I thought I was about to see jungle murder, but instead, after five awful minutes of tussling, it turned into a case of jungle love, for the mother instinct suddenly developed in Pageh. She mauled the little one thoroughly for the first five minutes, and then suddenly she stopped. She began to sniff him from

forehead to feet. Then she licked him carefully. They were both quiet now, and after a moment or two more of sniffing she calmly picked him up by the back of his neck and, climbing to my shoulder, deposited him in my shirt pocket. The next minute she was in with him, cuddling him in her little paws. Then they both dropped off to sleep.

From that day on Pageh considered him her charge. When she thought her adopted child needed food she would carry him over to me, placing him in my lap, then peep frantically until I had fed him. They made their home in one of my mosquito boots, from which she emerged early every morning to climb with him through a small hole she had made in my net and wake me up with her chatter. When his eyes were well open and he could run about she taught him to hunt locusts. They followed me everywhere I went, and that, alas, was their downfall.

We were hunting monkeys along a deep stream late one afternoon. As usual, the two of them had followed us. Vahnee and I sat down on a bank to rest while Pageh and her friend—somehow he never was given a name—busied themselves scurrying about in the leaves. All of a sudden we heard a loud squealing and looked back to see both of them hanging on to an amazingly large frog. Each had a grip on one of his hind legs, and with every hop he made they flew into the air behind him. It was funny at first, for he was hopping fast, and they looked for all the world like furry pennants flying, but when I saw that he was almost to the bank I jumped up and tried to reach them. But I realized their danger too late. In five quick springs he cleared the bank, and all three disappeared in the swift-running water.

Vahnee dived in after them, and I ran down ahead to see if they would come to the surface below. We saw nothing, and at dusk started sadly back to the town. Half a mile from the stream we heard a familiar noise behind. When we looked around there was Pageh, wet and dejected, running along toward us.

I picked her up and she climbed down into my pocket. She seemed to be crying, and her little peeps had lost their usual angry fire.

Pageh was never happy again, and one morning I awoke to find her dead in her boot house. She had seemed well enough the night before, and though after the baby died she never scampered about and chirped as she had before I hadn't suspected that she was ill. I think probably she wasn't; I think she was lonely for her baby.

It was late in November when Vahnee and the boys and I, together with Chief Boima and all his people from the country about, were standing in the centre of the town watching some "Bush Devil" entertainers and their boy dancers go through their paces. The "Bush Devils" are among the most highly respected of all native dignitaries. Their actual identities unknown to the populace, they take charge of boys when they reach adolescence, initiating them into the ways of the bush. After this the native sons are treated as boys no longer, for they are men. Even their own mothers must not treat them as sons, for they are men of the tribe now.

It was the harvest dance time, and a thanksgiving feast was on. The Devils, looking like haystacks topped with beautifully carved black masks, had finished their weird gyrations, the magicians had done their tricks, and the boy dancers, most of them under fourteen, were performing their extraordinary feats.

To the throb of thundering drums, their silver-spangled net jackets glittering in the sun and their plumed and feathered headdresses waving in the winds, the boys were jumping into the air and tossing one another about in a way that would have made Roxy's eyes pop. Two of them would grab a third and, swinging him round by the legs, throw him fifteen feet into the air as though he were a cat. The boy would turn three or four flips, then land on his feet as fresh and unruffled as a clean sheet. The climax

came when, in some miraculous way, one boy was tossed up on a hut roof and, poised there like a sparkling jewel, he stood for a moment while the drums burst into a roar, then suddenly were stilled and followed by silence. The boy lifted his arms slowly and looked towards the clouds and sun . . . toward the god of rain and harvest. He leaped from the hut top, gliding in a graceful swan dive toward the outstretched arms of two waiting dancers below. But something went wrong. They dropped him and he lay there on his face motionless, one arm under him. No one breathed or spoke. He had fallen thirty feet.

Things happened in a hurry then. We ran toward him, but the dancers and witch doctor wouldn't let me near him. They carried him away, still unconscious. One arm hung down; I could see that it was cleanly broken. What else, I didn't know. There was nothing to do. This was a secret bush matter, for the dancers were Bush Devil boys, so we went back to the hut.

The accident happened in the afternoon, and late that night there was a knock at my door. Vahnee opened it, and, much to my surprise, the boy who had fallen from the roof was led in by two men I had never seen before. The child was grey and haggard-looking, and his right arm from the shoulder to the elbow was puffed out and hung at a queer angle. He must have been in terrible pain, but he stood quietly while the two men explained that their witch doctor had been able to do nothing.

I suppose everyone has a vague idea of what to do for a break, but when I saw the arm at close range, hanging at that strange angle, what little idea I had in my mind fled. I had no anæsthetic, either general or local, but I did have one thing—whisky. I gave him a powerful shot; I took one myself. Then, while Flumo and Zo worked on some sticks for splints, Vahnee and I started on the boy.

The two men tried to put him on the bed, and he, letting out a terrible scream, started to cry and kick.

The arm hung loosely at his side. I talked to him for a few minutes and asked him to help me by being as quiet as he could. I talked to him in Vai, calling him "chief," telling him how brave he was. I told him what a fine arm this would be when it held a spear gun in the hunts to come. I urged him to show his people how a brave hunter acted in the face of danger. And he did. For ten minutes I felt his arm and worked it into a position so that, when straightened out, the broken ends *should* fit into place. The whole business was "blind flying," for the arm was so swollen my fingers told me almost nothing. And I had never set a broken bone before. The only thing to do was try. I gave him another drink, Vahnee held the shoulder, and I pulled. The boy screamed and there was a sickening swishy sound inside his arm. It still was at the awful angle. On the second try—I pulled with all my might—the ends met and, after getting it as nearly set as I could, we put on the splints and bound it up. We looked at each other hoping that it was done correctly—that was all we could do!

Later I found that luck had been with us; the arm was quite as good as new. I saw the boy make another jump from a higher roof three months afterward.

Word spread through the town and forests as word always does spread in the bush. They have no telegraph drums in the lower country, but the trees seem to talk and make up for them. How it is I don't know, but if you so much as scratch your thumb everyone knows about it by the time the iodine has dried.

By dawn the next morning people from all about were coming in to see the boy. He told his story so well (and it became slightly exaggerated of course in each telling) that I began to suspect I'd done a major operation! Next to God, the boy said, we were smartest. It had its good effect, for now instead of just small things, which they sometimes brought me, the natives began asking about more serious matters; how to keep down the malaria, how to steer clear of dysentery—all questions with which they had not trusted

me before. We were getting some place, and if they developed a real interest and desire to keep their towns in shape the doctor's job would surely be an easier one.

About a week after the dancer's tumble, I went to the far end of the town to talk to a woman who had come down from the upper country several weeks before. She was very interesting, and knew more of the folklore and old stories of the bush than almost any Gola I ever knew. I wanted her to give me some basis for interpreting the natives' measurement of time. When you ask a person how old he is, he will say: "Five wars and seven rice seasons," or, "Three wars and seven rice seasons," and so on. Time is measured always by wars and rice seasons. But no one seems to know how many seasons there are between the different wars, and that was what I wanted to find out.

We were sitting out in front of a large oblong hut getting along very nicely when suddenly the woman jumped up and, saying, "*Kahyai, way—'Mbay na-na, way,*" dashed into the hut. The first means "Excuse me," and when they say "*Mbay na-na*" it means "I will come back." Thinking that she had food to prepare I waited. It was quite evident that some time in the near future the woman was to have a child, but I didn't think it was imminent. Afterward, on looking back, I remembered that she had been making rather wry faces at gradually increasing intervals, but at the time it made no impression on me.

A young man of the town passed by soon after she disappeared into the hut and he stopped to chat. Exactly how long we talked I don't know. It seems not more than a half-hour, though it may have been a bit longer. At any rate, we had just got well into our chat when, from the door behind us, smiling broadly and looking very changed, the woman appeared. In her arms she held her newborn son and, sitting down beside me, she laid him out on her knees and started to stuff a warm rice gruel into his wet

little mouth. Then, saying the native equivalent for "to go on where we left off," she continued calmly talking about wars and rice seasons, while I looked on aghast, both at the casualness with which she had borne her child, and the dietary principle to which she subjected it now that it was born.

In certain parts of the bush there is a very bad belief which, to my mind, accounts, to a great extent, for the astoundingly high infant mortality rate. The people believe that the first milk which comes from the mother's breast is not good for the child and, therefore, should be forced out before the child is allowed to nurse. The mothers and midwives say that the babies don't like it, so of course it isn't good for them. Instead, rice is fed until the normal milk comes. The first liquid, of course, is a mild lubricant put there by nature for a specific reason—to start the child's bowels functioning. Until they do, it is often fatal to give the child food. But that is what is done through ignorance, and that is why, I think, so many of the chiefs I know have fewer children than they have wives. It is always the same story: their children die—"someone 'witched' them"—before they are a week old. To say that a paralysed stomach did it would bring guffaws of laughter.

When I got my breath I tried to convince the woman that she should not feed her baby the rice, that if she did her new son would die, but as usual my words carried little weight. Chief Boima happened along at that moment. I put the case before him, and he, having been much impressed with the arm-setting job, said that he could do nothing with this woman as she did not come from his country, but that only an hour before one of his young wives had given him a son, and if I wished I could have that child as a *dash* from him, and that he would be fed exactly as I directed. I accepted it and asked him to call the people together.

All the town came, and the two mothers with their new babies and I were the centre of attraction. I went through the long explanation about feeding, and

ended by saying that within three days the child of the first mother would be dead, while my child, having nothing to eat but what came from the mother's breast, would be alive and strong.

On the second night the first child died, and mine, when I left Africa six months later, was as healthy as any six-months-old baby I have ever seen. The example had its effect and others tried it too. But the tribesmen must be kept after; they must be shown twenty times or a hundred times before they remember. It takes a long time, for the old gives way slowly and by painful degrees to the new.

Chapter VIII

I HAD not intended, when I went into the interior with Vahnee, to pose as a doctor. Doing what I could for the broken arm of the boy in Kobolya, as anyone would, and demonstrating a very ordinary knowledge of the ABC's of infant diet, were mere accidents of time and place. But there is so much pain and death and sickness in Africa, and so little knowledge, and to that knowledge there is so much opposition offered by ancient customs and beliefs, that the slightest success in helping to alleviate misery and sorrow builds a reputation which has to be lived up to.

As a result of these things Seahfah urged me to go to Mahsahkbah, his head town, to help his people. As I learned later his invitation had been issued against the wishes of the people themselves, who distrusted all white men because they had been the victims of white slavers years before.

They had even become suspicious of their chief because he left his country to hunt with me, and, when he told them he wanted to bring his new friend to help them, they had threatened to kill him. Finally, as a last resort, he had told them that I could work magic and would do anything they asked of me. They hardly believed him, but the word "magic" tempted them. It was agreed that if I brought only my headman Vahnee, with very few other carriers, I might come.

My greeting was a cautious one. They eyed me from a careful distance and then, being Africans with an age-old love of the hunt and the meat feasts that always followed—which was second only to their love for strong man-children—asked that I kill an elephant. There were elephants in that section, and I had said with boasting confidence, which not only amused but pleased them, that I would kill as many as they could use. It is all very well to bluff your way into a bush village. The black man likes big words; but you must back them up to hold his respect. That was my trouble.

For three long nightmarish days Seahfah and I cut our way through the bush. Many times we came upon, and, in the fever of chance, followed hopelessly old tracks, but as luck would have it we found no fresh ones. The last two nights I was too tired and nervous to sleep. It wasn't that the people were starving and needed food, though they always could use meat, but simply that they had asked me to do something and I had failed. If we were successful in making friends with these people, then the chief's other towns would follow easily. If we failed there was little chance, for the present at least, in the lower country. Something had to be done soon, or neither Seahfah nor I would be safe in that region.

As we walked from the trail into the clearing round the first circle of huts, a sentinel jumped forward. He glanced up at us—a strange look in his black eyes—then disappeared in the shadows. A moment later the deep hollow bark of a signal drum sounded, and a shout went up from the town. Mats were pulled from before doors, and questioning faces appeared below sputtering torches. People dashed through the streets calling, and soon a crowd had gathered about us. A grey and withered half-naked hag pushed her way up to my side. She carried a feeble flare which, with trembling clawlike hands, she held unsteadily before my face.

"The meat! Where is the meat, white man?"



The natives' faces show the awe and respect which they feel for
the visiting bush devil

She fairly screamed it at me, and when I shook my head she turned to the others waving her skinny arms.

"No meat! No meat! Why get wet to greet the lying white man!"

The shouting died as quickly as it had begun. The natives turned back to their huts muttering. Bare feet swished on wet clay, and the rain dripped steadily from the black above us. Mats were jerked down over doors, and, but for the flickering light in the old woman's hand, the village was once again in darkness. Then with a scratchy hiss, her whole body twitching jerkily with excitement, she turned on me.

"White man—you! Why do you come? Would you slave us once more! Go! Go from us!"

She thrust the flare at my face. Her mouth, a toothless wrinkled hole rimmed by bare gums, was leering at me. Then Seahfah struck her, and the torch fell.

Seahfah and I walked toward our compound at the far end of the town. As we passed in front of a large mud house, a man suddenly came to the door. He was holding a long elephant spear in his hand, and as we looked up he started to swing it slowly back and forth.

"I hunt elephants with iron only, white man—but I bring back food!"

He bent over and picked up a chunk of dried meat. I didn't answer him, and we walked on into the last cluster of thatched roofs. While Seahfah pushed his mat aside, I looked back. The man was silhouetted in a doorway. Firelight flickered behind him, and he still swung the spear, holding the meat in his hand. His head was high; he laughed at me.

Inside the hut it was smoky. The logs that had burned on the dirt floor were almost out, and the little bits of soft grey ash lay scattered where the wood had been. There was a hole in the roof; off in one shadowy corner came the steady splashing drip of rain. Seahfah groped about for a moment and then came to the fire with a fresh torch in his hand. He

thrust it down into the embers and, as the flames licked up, lifted it above his head and looked about the flickering mud-walled room.

"Mietta . . . Mietta!"

There was no answer, and he called again.

"Mietta! Where are you? Why do you not greet us? Are you, too, like the others?"

"Ah, Seahfah, I was sleeping. I did not hear you come. The drums . . . they do not beat to welcome . . ."

The voice came from beyond a bamboo screen. We walked behind it and found Mietta lying on a heap of clothes. Her face was drawn and tired. She smiled up at us—a look of understanding—then bowed her head.

"I am sorry. Sometimes our people do not know the white man. I am ashamed for them."

Seahfah put his hand on her shoulder; his strong body grew tense, then his face lighted up and he looked toward me.

"It is true. Our people are children, but I can forget they are small, for Mietta brings me a first son tonight. He will belong to you, and I will call him by your name. You will be happy then, and forget."

I left them together and went through the rain to my hut. Vahnee and the carriers greeted me. They, too, understood and were sorry, but there was nothing to say. We had failed and might expect anything. Aching and tired, I was too disappointed to think or care. I ate my supper in silence and threw myself on the cot. Vahnee sat alone by the fire until the logs had sunk to coals; then he rolled up in his cloth and lay down before the door.

"Sleep, Massah. Tomorrow brings another light, and the people will change their ways. This village is like others we have known before."

The coals turned dusty white, the rain kept falling monotonously from the thatch, and we slept.

It seemed only a moment later that I was awakened by shouting, and a man dashed into the room.

"Lantern! Lantern! Give me a lantern, quick!"

I did not know the voice, and it seemed a strange thing to ask, but I gave him the one beside my bed. The way in which he tore it from my hands surprised me, but I thought no more about it and soon dropped off again.

I felt that I had just gone fast asleep for the second time when I opened my eyes to find Seahfah standing over my cot, shaking me. His face was strange and showed almost grey in the yellow torchlight.

"My baby does not cry! Come, Massah, quick! My boy will not cry!"

I was too surprised to move. The fact that his baby would not cry meant nothing to me, and I couldn't understand why he had come to tell me. Indeed, I felt that he was rather fortunate if his baby refused to cry, and was about to tell him so when he shook me again, pulling my blankets away as he did it.

"Don't look at me, Massah, come! My baby is dead, and the people are with Mietta waiting for you to come and make him live. Hurry, Massah! You . . ."

But I heard no word that he said. I was numb with fright. Through the frozen blackness of my mind came little flashes of what had happened. Faint darts of light that blistered hot, for a moment, and then left me all the colder when I realized what was ahead. How and what to do! When I needed it most, my mind refused to warm and tell me.

We were out of the house, I knew that. I knew, too, that it had stopped raining. Seahfah pulled me along by the arm through little pools of glassy black water that lay about us like sheets of ice until they caught the light of his torch and, for a moment, seemed to burn as we passed them.

Outside Seahfah's house a large gathering of men was standing. They were silent, and as they made way for us I saw nothing but eyes. Hundreds of eyes were following me; cold dead eyes that looked, yet seemed to see nothing; eyes that stared and froze me with their blankness. When we got inside the hut they were still before me, only now there were not so many,

and women were behind them, women smelling of smoky sweat and palm oil, who moaned, making me faint and vaguely sick and frightened. My lantern was on the floor, and before it sat a very old woman. In her arms was something limp which she swung back and forth in a strange manner, mumbling meaningless words as she did so.

Suddenly she looked up. Our eyes met, and the room began to spin round me, taking with it all but the old hag and that which she clutched in her arms. Then a sound; she was speaking. Her voice came to me as from a great distance. A judgment was in her words, a cruel judgment that made me hate my boasting, Africa, and all things that were about me. Words only, but they found me weak and helpless.

"Now, white man, you will try. We can do nothing. Our chief tells us you can work magic. He believes in you. Bring his son to life!"

I looked back for Seahfah. He was going out through the door. I was alone!

A weight was in my arms—a weight soft and cold and damp like wet putty. A weight that was a child. A child who lived, but did not breathe, and whose brown little hand lay limp against my chest; whose tiny head was back, resting, light, upon my arm. A child I scarcely knew I held, yet a weight so great it crushed, and hardly let me stand.

My mouth was dry, and my throat like burning straw. I tried to swallow but could not, for there was nothing but a dusty taste on my tongue. The baby's head rolled over to the other side. His mouth dropped open.

"If you know all, hurry, or it will be too late."

The old woman was speaking again. I was panicky!

"It is too late! Now it is too late! Take the baby—I can do nothing!"

I bent over and held the child out to her. She sprang back, and as she did, I saw Mietta. Her face was lovely, and there was something in her look that made me alive inside and unafraid. She smiled, and

in her smile I saw another person. My mother, who once had laughed, and told me that when I was born the doctor had to spank me to make me breathe. I remembered now—clearly. Where had he slapped me, though? Why hadn't I asked that? It was too late now to wonder. Something had to be done at once!

There seemed to be only one place. My body trembled as I caught the baby's feet in my left hand and held him out before me. He hung there limp, his tiny arm swinging down below his head. Saliva dripped from his mouth, dulling itself in the powdered ash that puffed up from the floor. Then I slapped him, and he swung loose and ropelike in my hand. Again I slapped him.

Nothing happened, and I looked once more at the women round me. Black motionless figures that did not move. Things that only stared—and waited. No sound could I hear but the throbbing pump of my pulse. The child was now a heavy pull in my hand, and I thought I should surely drop him. I would, and then I could run from the place before it was too late!

Someone coughed, and, looking up, I saw Mietta. Once more she smiled, and something fresh swept over me—like a cool breeze, making my mind clear, and my body not so numb.

I struck the baby again, this time on the back, but still nothing happened. Then in a frenzy, that was no more than the desperation of defeat, I slapped him three times as hard as I could, and suddenly I heard a sound! I couldn't believe my ears! A little choking sob broke forth, followed by a loud cry. The baby cried and breathed! Hands—many of them—were held out to mine. The baby was lifted from me. He cried and lived!

We stood in the open place outside the hut, Seahfah and I, with countless faces about us. Seahfah laughed—everyone laughed—and above their laughter came the boom of drums and the thud of dancing feet. It was dawn, but the moon was still out and the stars

shone through the mist that fell about us, bringing the fragrant morning smell of the jungle with it. An old woman pushed through the men to the place where we were standing. She clutched me round the waist and looked up, a smile on her wrinkled and scarred face.

"Thank you. Thank you, *Mahsahgie*."

I put my hand on her head. Her hair looked wiry, but it felt soft and beautiful.

And now a native hunter stood before me. He was tall and young and well built; he carried a long elephant spear in his hand. He paused a moment trembling, his dark eyes wide—half in awe, half in fear—then fell, pressing his hot face against my muddy feet.

"Thank you, *Mahsahgie*. I give you this small *dash*. Thank you. I am your slave. You *are* magic."

He rose and, still trembling, put the spear into my hand. I tried to hold it, but it slipped away. I heard my voice, far off, saying, "Thank you—but I'm not magic. You can do the same thing. You must remember."

He picked the spear up and laid it against my shoulder. Then he took my right hand and rubbed it on his forehead and over his heart.

"Thank you," I heard myself saying, and I felt very foolish.

A baby cried in the hut behind us, and as I walked to my compound the sound followed me, clear and strong above the drums and chanting.

A baby cried, and I slept.

Chapter IX

WE were back in Binda-Jah and it was the evening before my nineteenth birthday. Vahnee and all the boys, together with Chief Boima and the big men of Binda-Jah, sat with me in a great circle around a crackling fire on the floor of our hut.

I had killed a chimpanzee that day and there had been great rejoicing, for the people had said that I had killed a wicked witch and freed the town from its curse. I questioned them but they looked at me mysteriously and would give me no further explanation.

"The thief is dead," they said, "now his people will not dare to bother us for moons to come."

Then they would look off to the east, toward Kongbah, and there would be apprehension in their eyes as they looked back.

"It is good that we live so far from the forest," I heard one whisper, but I could get nothing further from him.

It was the fifth of December, and at home there would be snow on the ground, and log fires burning on the hearths. That was why I had lighted our fire; I wanted to feel near home. The smell of burning wood and the restless sputter of dry logs made me feel a little closer to those other fires.

I had felt rather lonely and depressed and wanted something like a birthday party, so, at Vahnee's sugges-

tion, I had asked the men to a story-telling palaver by way of celebration. Several deer had been killed and much rice and pepper *soupe* boiled, and the hut properly decorated for the occasion. Flumo and the boys had done this, and it was entirely their own idea. They gathered palm fronds and hung them gracefully along the walls and from the ceilings and spread brightly-dyed leather hassocks and woven country cloths over the floor. When the guests arrived each had been handed some little gift or trinket—knives, beads and silver wire, the sort of thing they love—and even before the feast had started I was in the best of spirits. I knew that my birthday would not pass unremembered.

When the venison had been eaten and the rice pots polished clean, Vahnee brought in the special surprise—one that we had carried about with us for months saving for just such a special occasion as this—three plum puddings. Not even a successful elephant hunt had warranted one of them, but now I felt the time had come. When they were carried in, soaked with rum and flashing their blue flames in the dusky room, a gratifying sigh went up from the gathering. What manner of "chop" was this! It surely must be White King feast-food! We let the puddings burn for a little while and then cut them up so that each man had an equal part. I had not tasted anything so good in years, it seemed, and was so busy with my own small piece that I paid no attention to the others' reactions. When I did it was with a definite feeling of doubt. The chief had finished his and was licking his fingers, but some of the other men were frowning and shaking their heads. Well, at least the chief appreciates good food, I thought, and turned to him with a smile.

"How do you like it, *Mahsahgie*?" I asked.

There was a moment of pause as he licked the last finger, then he looked up.

"It is very good chop, *Mahsahgie*," he answered, "in fact, I know of only one better and that, of course, is the best in all the world."

"And what is that?" I asked, my face falling a bit more.

"Rice and pepper *soupe*," he answered, and then added, "I wonder if your boys would cook some more—with plenty of pepper."

He was given the rice and pepper *soupe*, of course, with plenty of pepper, and then he took the story-telling sword in his hand and his face became dark and solemn as he sat for a moment without speaking, while a suddenly fallen silence held us all. Then he looked directly at me, and his voice was solemn as he spoke.

"*Mahsahgie*, I thank you," he said. "I thank you for myself and for my people. You have killed a thief in our forest, and his brothers will not come again to steal our food. And because you have killed him—this son of man and of witch—you shall hear his story. Only those of the jungle may hear it, for it is fitting only those who have lived with him should know why he haunts."

He paused and raised his arm slowly, impressively, pointing to the east, and I felt my skin tingling and my heart beating rapidly, for he was pointing toward the haunted forest.

"Many, many wars and rice seasons ago," he began, "there lived a man and his wife. They had been good people, but once in a fit of anger the man killed a friend in the town where he lived. When the clans gathered to talk his palaver they decided, as was the law in our country then, that, because he had killed one of his own tribe, he and his wife must go and live alone for two rice seasons in the forest of Kongbah. Only after he had done this could he return to our people and live again as a brother among them.

"The man promised the chief of the clans that he would obey their rules and the next morning he and his wife, together with the head clan chief and five of his elephant-hunters, started on their long journey into the forest.

"The first part of the trip took them through country

where they had been before, but when at last they entered Kongbah the man and his wife knew that they could no longer find their way back. Then for three suns they walked through wilder forests than they had ever seen, up rocky mountains, higher than they had dreamed mountains could be, and across rushing rivers, swifter and less friendly than those laughing streams of their own country. Always they went on, deeper and deeper into the stillness of the forest.

"Meat was plentiful and often as they went along they heard the elephant and bush cow ahead, breaking for a moment the silence about them as they crashed off into the bush. Then quiet would follow and only the sound of their footsteps could be heard; that and a faint murmuring which was all about them. It was the lonely forest of Kongbah speaking—the forest in which the man and his wife must live alone for two rice seasons before they could come again to their people."

The chief paused and rubbed the large leopard tooth that hung about his neck. His voice was lower when he spoke again.

"Early in the morning on the eighth sun from their village, they came suddenly out of the trees and onto a great, low swamp. It was overgrown with thick vines and had a damp, steamy smell, and the earth was moving and soft beneath it. Here they stopped and the chief called the man and his wife to him and said:

" 'We have come to the centre of the forest of Kongbah. Few of my people have ever seen this country, and none but my hunters know the trail back. Here you two must live alone until we come again for you when the second rice season has passed. Remember all that the chiefs have told you and remember, too, that if people should come they will be witches, for only my hunters know their way in all this great silence, and they shall not come until I send them to bring you back to our people.' "

"With that the chief and his hunters turned and

walked back into the forest, leaving the two alone on the edge of the swamp.

"Moons passed and the man and his wife cut a farm in the forest and built a little hut near a stream that flowed into the swamp. They grew all the rice and fruit that they needed and, as there were fish in the stream and many animals in the bush, they had plenty to eat, but they were not happy. Always they thought of their friends in the towns and longed to be back with them again, dancing when the moon was alive and sitting around their fires talking when the night was dark. It was hard for them there in the forest, for man cannot live in joy without friends, laughter and dancing.

"Then one day two deer who were walking along the stream saw the pleasant little farm and the man and his wife.

" 'Isn't it a nice farm that the man and his wife have across the stream?' said the first deer. 'I should like to live there with them for a little while.'

"The second deer laughed and said, 'The rainy season is coming on now and we shall be cold in the forest. Besides, the man and his wife look lonely and there is little chance of others coming to this far place. Let us do what you wish.'

"So quickly they changed themselves into women, as deer can always change themselves into people when they wish. Then carefully wrapping their skins in banana leaves they put them under a rock in the stream so that they would be soft when they returned to change themselves back into deer again. When this was done they crossed the stream and started up to the hut to greet the two people.

"When the man and his wife saw them coming they were so surprised that they stood there without speaking until the two deer came up to them and said:

" 'Good day, lonely forest dwellers. We are very glad to see you, for we have not seen friends in many suns.'

" 'Good day,' answered the surprised man and his

wife. 'We are very glad to see you too, for we have lived alone for many moons. Come and have some food with us, and after we have eaten tell us the news of the country beyond the forest.'

"So they went into the hut together and had some rice and fish that the man's wife cooked over the little fire in the centre of the floor. Then when they had all finished their meal the man said:

" 'Now that we have had food together and our stomachs are sleeping, tell us where you come from and how you came into this lonely forest.'

" 'We come from a far country,' said the first deer. 'Our clans live behind the great mountains in the Gola country. We went into the forest with the people of our town to help cut a dead elephant that one of our hunters shot. Coming back, our loads of meat were heavy and we could not keep up with the others. When darkness came we were lost.'

" 'So you come from the Gola country,' said the man excitedly; 'we came from that country too. What is the name of your town?'

"Now the two deer did not know the names of any Gola towns, so they remained silent for a moment. Then the second deer said:

" 'Our town is suns from here, and we have forgotten the name of it. We have travelled far in the great forest, and at last have found others like ourselves. Now we come to ask a favour of you and you at once ask us where we come from. We are tired—you can see that—and the suns of wandering have taken our strength and our memory from us. All we ask is that you take us as your wives.'

"And the first deer quickly said: 'Yes, please take us as your wives! We will work hard and help you and your head wife with the food and farms. If you don't take us we shall starve. . . . Please do not drive us away!'

"Now the man was lonely, and even though these two women were very strange and said they could not remember the name of their town, he wanted them to

stay. He knew that the chief had told him he and his wife must live alone, and he also remembered that the head chief had told him about witches, but still he wanted to keep the women.

"And so they became his wives—though the council of chiefs had said that he could have but one wife while he spent his time in the forest."

The chief took a deep drink of palm wine. Then he fingered his leopard's tooth and went on.

"Moons passed and the second season was coming to an end. The four people had lived happily enough together, but always the head wife—as all women are—was suspicious, and always in the man's mind was the thought of the council of chiefs and what they would do if they knew he had broken their rules.

"Late one night after the man and his head wife had gone to bed the two deer were sitting by the fire in their hut thinking, when one said: 'We have been very happy here on this little farm, living with the man and his wife, but now I fear we must leave them and go back to our old life. Speak, little bush sister, and tell me what thoughts are in your heart.'

"Now the other deer had considered this too, so she answered: 'You are right, my sister. We are deer of the forest and must not always live as women. It is best that we return to our friends in the bush and live as we should.'

"The next evening just as the sun was closing its eyes they both walked quietly from the house and started down to the stream. They were almost there when they heard the sound of splashing in the water ahead of them. Quickly they jumped into the thickets beside the trail and crept to the banks of the stream. What they saw when they looked through the leaves so frightened them that their hearts grew cold and for a long time they could not even breathe.

"There in the centre of the stream stood the man's head wife with a large fishing net in her hands; she was dipping it down into the water catching fish. They

had often seen her doing this, but the part that frightened them was the place where she was standing. It was right in front of the rock under which their skins were hidden! Then, as the two deer watched without breathing, the net went down. They scarcely moved. Up it came full of fish, and they sighed. Down it went again. The woman was struggling; something heavy was in it. . . . Up came the net and the two skin bundles were in it. The two deer's foreheads were wet with big drops of fear and they dared not show themselves but stayed where they were while the man's head wife left the stream, calling loudly for her husband.

"Later, when all the forest and sky were in darkness, the two deer slipped quietly from their place of hiding and stole up to the hut. As they came near they heard the voice of the man inside saying:

" 'I feared that no good would come of those two strange women, and now we both shall suffer if we do not kill them—for, once they are deer again, they will tell their forest brothers, and news of what we have done will get to the clans through some of the two strangers' witchcraft.'

" 'I know what we can do,' said the woman; 'when you go to bed I will put the skins on the drying rack above the fire and let the smoke come up about them all through the night. In the morning they will be dry and the magic of the deer will be broken. They will no longer be able to turn themselves into animals, and so they will die in the bush as punishment for working their trick upon us.'

" 'You are very clever,' said the man; 'but be sure to watch the skins carefully all through the night.'

"With that he walked over to his mat and lay down to sleep while the woman busily made a large fire and unwrapped the skins.

"Soon the two deer saw the woman come to the door with a torch in her hand. She looked about her for a moment, then walked across the little open place

before the house and into the forest. Swiftly they ran through the door, caught up the bundles, and were off to the water. Standing there in the stream, just after they had finished wetting them—for they had become a little dry while over the fire—they heard the sound of fast footsteps running down the trail. The man and his wife were coming to look for them. Like quick flashes of lightning in a storm they changed themselves into deer and were off into the forest, leaving the man and his wife helpless on the other side of the stream.

"Several moons later the two deer had babies—the strangest ever seen in all the great forest. They were half man and half deer—the chimpanzee; and that is why the chimpanzee always lets the deer loose from the trap that the man has set for her; and ever since that time these children of the man who disobeyed the laws of the clan, and the deer who played with magic, have lived around us in our forests.

"It was not long after the two strange animals were born—and they grew very fast, for they were the first of their race—that the chief of the lower Gola clans and his five elephant-hunters started back into Kongbah to get the man and his wife. The two rice seasons were over and the tribe was preparing for a welcome feast and the dance which would wash away the killing. After many suns of walking they came again to the great misty swamp, but they found no one by it and heard no sounds of the man and his wife near by. At first they thought the two might be dead, but just when this had come to their minds they heard an awful scream in the bush behind them. They all turned and what they saw made them tremble and fall on the ground.

"Coming toward them, running and screaming as though death were in her heart, was the man's head wife. Her cloth had been torn and she was bleeding. When she had almost reached them the leaves beside her suddenly flew out and her husband leaped upon her back, ripping her throat with his cutlass. She

fell to the ground, and as she died they heard him say:

"This I have done because you let the witches come to live with us!"

"Then he turned and started to stagger slowly back into the forest. He had gone but a few steps when, from the trees above, two strange manlike beasts fell upon him and pulled him to earth. They had high shrieking voices like the woman and they kept beating their hairy chests and screaming as they dragged the man toward the swamp."

The chief stopped again. He was sweating and his mouth hung open a little. He seemed to be seeing the picture again. Then his voice went on and it made me cold—I could see it, too.

"When the two strange animals came to the edge of the swamp they stopped and the man stood between them. They no longer held him, but suddenly from the sky a great flash of lightning came and close behind it an earth-shaking clap of thunder. The chief and his hunters were blinded for a moment, and when they opened their eyes they still could not see. Then slowly—through flashes—they saw; they were frightened beyond a murmur.

"The two animals still stood on the edge of the swamp, but between them was not the man. Where he had been a great hairy ape now stood. He was like the others, only much larger, and around his waist and neck hung—as they had hung on the man—a silver loin-band and wristlet; in his hand was the cutlass.

"Before the men could move, he and his two screaming helpers were upon them. The five hunters were killed before the chief's eyes and then, when he thought his end had come, another bolt of lightning struck and all had turned to blackness.

"When he awoke he was on the edge of the forest; the sun was out and the swamp was far away. He opened his eyes to find the strange beast above him.

"Go!" it shouted, 'and tell your cursed people that the man they sent to punish has turned into a witch.



A Church procession

Go from my forest now and never dare return. When men come after this sun I shall eat them.'

"As he spoke he swung the bloody cutlass against his chest. It hit with a blinding flash of light, then thunder followed and the chief of the clans remembered no more until he found himself in his village."

As the old chief spoke the last words he clapped his hand upon his chest. His jaw twitched and his eyes began to sparkle. He put his mouth close to my ear and above the wind I heard him whisper:

"That was how it happened! And his cutlass is dripping still. He will haunt the forest for ever. He is there. . . . He is waiting. . . . Whenever men pass through the swamp he feasts."

He leaned back and there was a deep silence about us. Fear hung over the entire gathering, and I was no exception. But gradually the face of Boima Que softened, and his eyes took on a dreamy look. With the true instinct of the story-teller and perfect guest he knew that the story of Kongbah was not the note on which to end a birthday celebration, and he began to speak of his great-uncle, King Dahndai, and of his wisdom and bravery in ruling the back country. I had heard of Dahndai ever since I had been in Liberia, and I wanted to see him almost as much as I wanted to see the haunted forest.

But Boima Que passed on quickly to a story of the creation, his eyes wandering meanwhile to the pepper *soupe* dish, and I could see that, even while he talked of the ancient mysteries, the matter of food was still in his mind. As he finished his story—a glorious fable about how the stars and moon came into the sky—and the sword was passed on to his speaker, he excused himself, saying that in a little while he would return with a surprise for me. The sword had been passed on twice, and two more fine stories told, before he returned. As he came through the door two of his young wives, carrying large wooden bowls, pressed in close behind him. My heart sank and my stomach jumped, for reeking up from those steaming bowls

was the smell of rotting flesh. This was some great delicacy, I guessed, choice cuts of a brave hunter's rare kill which the chief had smoked and put aside for a great occasion—and this was the great occasion!

"It is *moli*, the dwarf hippopotamus," the chief said impressively as his wives put the steaming mass down in front of me. "We have saved these parts six moons. They were not to be eaten until a happy sun had come. It has come now—the day of your mother's and father's great joy." He put his hand down into the chunky mess and, lifting out a piece, put it into his mouth and swallowed. This is the bush custom. "Eat before you offer food—taste before you offer drink. Then the guest can know there is no poison." It was my turn now. Not to eat would be a tragic insult, but . . . the smell was almost more than I could bear! This great delicacy . . . for me . . . it had been saved for months—months? . . . *Months!*

I put my hand down into the greyish, greasy hash, and took out a small section of something that looked as though it might once have been skin. I lifted it to my mouth and took a small nibble. The smell was nauseating, but the taste was beyond description. I smiled, and the circle of men smiled too. After I had eaten, then they might. They were anxious—and hungry. This was food for chiefs! It was all I could do to keep from gagging. Then suddenly I made an awful face and looked up horrified at the chief.

"Did you say this was *moli*, *Mahsahgie*?"

The chief nodded, smiling. I had told him once I liked the meat.

"And how long has it been since the hunter killed it?"

"Six moons."

"Oh, my God! I should not have touched it," I shouted. "In my family it is tabu! Any *moli* over three moons old we dare not eat. It is tabu! We die if we do!"

The chief was genuinely disturbed. "It is well that you had but a taste," he said. "I am very sorry, *Mahsahgie*."

"It is I who am sorry, for you know how I love it. But now you all must eat."

The incident was passed over. A family tabu explains all things. Every native has one or two or many foods that are tabu, that he must not eat. Because of my unfortunate tabu, my abstinence was forgiven, otherwise it would have been a serious breach of bush etiquette.

To the natives, the slimy *moli* was a great delicacy. They never become ill from eating old and often maggoty flesh; in fact, they gorge themselves continually on meat which is usually half-rotten before it is smoked and then kept months before it is eaten. It is boiled for hours of course, so the germs are killed, and the rank taste and smell are highly prized. So in a very short time the bowls were licked clean, the last cup of palm wine had been passed around and the night of passing the sword of the story-teller had come to a happy ending. My birthday party had been a great success.

As Boima Que and his chiefs rose from their hassocks and started to pass through the door I touched him on the shoulder.

"Where does your great-uncle live?" I asked, and he paused and looked into my eyes a moment. "Beyond the first mountains," he answered, pointing off toward the east and Kongbah. "It is one long day from here, but now it is two, for Walahdu, the Witch Doctor, will not let us pass through M'bahmabala and we must go around. He has fought with Dahndai, and swears he will kill men who come to see him."

I nodded and he passed on through the door. I leaned on the rough mud sill of the window and looked out toward the mountains. The sun was rising into a rich purple sky and the mist was sinking away.

Chapter X

It was eight in the morning and the boxes were packed, for we were about to start for Zimi, King Dahndai's head town. Boima Que had warned me against going, and especially against taking the trail we proposed to take, saying that no white man had ever passed that way, but his tales of Dahndai and of the haunted forest had so inflamed my imagination that I wanted to be off at once.

I stood before the door of the hut, going over details of last-minute preparation with Vahnee, when a strange runner came panting up to me and handed me a piece of goatskin with a message on it. Surprised, I opened the note and read.

"Your runner, Jalla-Boe, son of Zahnta of Gbahndi country, is rascal and thief," it said. "He not paid me sixpence for palm oil he buy yet. I sue him for twelve pounds and he better bring £12-0-0 silver this sun or I drive you from Gola country." It was signed "Zuahna—Paramount Chief Taywah Section."

At first I laughed and then I got very angry. Zuahna was a chief, but not of the true blood. Until the last war Boima Que had been paramount chief of Taywah. Now Zuahna had supplanted him. He was a weak and blustering fellow, harmless in himself, but dominated by his "clerk," six feet of riffraff that had slunk up from the coast and, because he knew how to

write and murder English, was bleeding the lower Golas of every shilling he could get his dirty hands on. The letter was written by him, and the reason for it very clear.

A month before I had sent Jalla-Boe down with a shilling to buy sixpence worth of oil from the chief, and he had not accepted the money, said he could not make change and wanted a sixpenny piece. I had none and sent him back to get the other sixpence worth in oil, too. He came back to say that they would not sell it to him and still refused to take the shilling. The whole matter had slipped my mind until the letter came. Now it was all too clear what they hoped to do. They were jealous because Vahnee and I were living with Chief Boima Que, Zuahna's rival, and twelve pounds was what they hoped to get to assuage their jealousy. Sixty dollars' fine because we owed them twelve cents!

I was tired from our night of story-telling and in no mood for small-boy bluffing. I thought of three things to do: to send the chief's runner back with a kick in the loincloth for the man who wrote the letter; to go down with a whole retinue—hammock, gun-boys, interpreters and all—and give it to him personally; to go down with only Vahnee and try a bit of bluffing myself. I chose the last and started off. But I was not, as I picked up the elephant gun and strode from the hut, in the best of birthday spirits.

Dahmbahlah was Paramount Chief Zuahna's court town, and it lay on a rolling rise a normal trek-hour to the west of Binda-Jah. When Vahnee and I reached the halfway mark, where palm fronds were arranged on both sides of the trail to show that here Boima Que's jurisdiction ended and Zuahna's began, we had only been on the trail fifteen minutes. We hadn't spoken a word all this time, and the green sides of the winding trail had fairly flown past us as we lurched along. I was too angry to speak, for the more I thought of the note and what lay behind it the tighter my throat became.

A hundred yards beyond the palm fence which marked the division between the chiefs' territories the two of us paused to take a breath. We stood in Zuahna's territory now. I lighted a cigarette and was about to unburden myself of a few more pent-up curses when Vahnee lifted his hand suddenly and pointed up the trail excitedly. I listened. Voices were coming toward us, voices in the English of coast Negroes. One of them I recognized. It was that of the chief's clerk. We slipped off the trail and waited. The voices came nearer, and two motley-looking men appeared. They stopped about ten paces from where we sat and the clerk, clad in a new pair of red corduroy trousers with a dirty mess jacket topped by a shining white and noticeably brand-new helmet, took a deep breath and rubbed his sweating forehead.

"Heah's de bes' place to wait fo' him," he said, looking down importantly on his even more ridiculously dressed flunkey.

The flunkey—I had never seen him before, but the coast abounds in the same breed—was togged in an old morning coat, a red striped tie, no collar, white shorts, and yellow shoes that evidently were giving him a great deal of trouble, for he took them off before he answered.

"Whateveh yo' say," he drawled lazily and then started to rub his feet.

"Let it dig into yo' eahs and keep in deah," the clerk went on. "De man he got de lettah now and I know he nervous. His boy come by any time now, and all we get de money. You grabs him and I takes it and den I hands him a good floggin'. He run back, and we gone Monrovia and I rich. We goin' eat dat twev' pound!"

He paused and mopped his mouth with a sleeve. Morning Coat was unwinding a long whip from about his middle and when it was free he handed it to the clerk.

"Whateveh yo' say," he mumbled and, slipping his shoes under his arm, started down the trail toward the

boundary line. The clerk watched him until he rounded a bend, then started to creep in toward us.

But he hadn't taken two steps when Vahnee was on him and had brought a pistol butt down through the cheap helmet with a *thunk* that I thought surely would split his skull. It did not, but it silenced him for a period and when he came to, and I had brought his friend back, he was still feeling it.

Poor old Morning Coat was as helpless as he was ridiculous. With a kick in the shins we sent him off. He really didn't even deserve that, but I think it cooled any desire he still might have cherished to get rich in a hurry. I never saw him after that, and I don't suppose he will ever show up in Gola again. For his sake I hope he doesn't.

Our problem was now what to do with a slightly groggy fellow who wore, instead of the jaunty white helmet, a nice thick bump on his head. I was all for taking him back to Boima Que, but Vahnee didn't think that was such a good plan. He said we should take him on to Zuahna and get the thing settled once and for all. In the end we did neither. A thing happened just as we were nearing the town that made more impression on him than two days of horsewhipping would have. My part in it I must admit was pure luck. I consider myself a fair shot, but I most assuredly can't shoot the way one beggar, who now probably wears a pair of very shabby red shorts, thinks I can.

We were within shouting distance of the town, skirting a broad open field newly harvested of its rice, and brown in the morning sun. A group of curious natives had come out and joined us, and Vahnee had wasted no time in telling them the facts in the case. They were muttering about what they were going to do to the rascal while he, just as I might have expected, was slobbering at my feet, begging me not to let them hurt him and saying just what any unfortunate would in that same predicament, when from the opposite end of the field a shout went up, and I turned to see two large bongos galloping down the far slope at a fast and

startled pace. They were out of reasonable range, but I lifted the gun anyway and fired at the leader. On the first shot he fell, and, almost too surprised to move, I worked the lever and fired at the second one. It fell, too, and neither of them moved. There was a moment of quiet; then the group of Dahmbahlah men started slowly to back away.

The bongo, one of the largest and rarest of the antelope family, is considered almost a phantom by the natives in that section. Its long, thick-based, spiralling horns make it rather a formidable-looking creature, and, because of its elusive habits, few are ever shot by the natives. To track and shoot one in the bush a man must be a truly excellent hunter. He automatically becomes a distinguished personage when he has done it. But to them, the only thing that mattered now was that two were dead—two at once and with two shots. The fact that I had not tracked them didn't come into it. Two were dead! . . . The white man, if not to be liked, was to be feared!

Red Pants was grey with fright and I—well, I was more dumb-struck than all the rest! Vahnee, always on his toes, grabbed the situation and turned the silver to gold.

"Now you see!" he shouted. "Tell your people about this—tell them what you've seen today. He'll do the same thing to the first man who tries rascal tricks. Even the bongo can't run away from the big gun!"

The villagers melted like mist in the sun. With a swift wordless motion, Vahnee swung the flat of his hand against the cheek of the trembling man who had so shortly lost all desire to drive us from the country, and then let him go. I thought his red pants would catch fire as he flew through the town! Him, too, we never saw again. I hope we never do.

We strolled into Dahmbahlah to find a very meek paramount chief who didn't even so much as murmur about a sixpence that was owed him. We brought that embarrassing matter up and tapped our toes impa-

tiently while he dipped into a bag full of sixpences and made change. He heaped *dashes* of chickens, oranges and whatnots on us, which were promptly heaped back on him. We wasted no words, and left the town fifteen minutes after we arrived. In parting he offered me a beautiful silver dagger as a "friendship *dash*," but I returned it saying that I could not exchange such gifts with chiefs who offered them for reasons other than their true one. Friendship from him had come too late. There could be peace, and there would be, but not friendship. From his people, yes, but not from him.

Of course, it seemed a very childish way to act, but there was nothing else to do. If I had accepted his gift, he, in his people's eyes, would have had the victory. They would have said I accepted the dagger because I was afraid not to. As it was, we kept our smiles from our faces and left Dahmbahlah with no further palavering. We were well on the way to Zimi when the men came from Binda-Jah to butcher the two animals.

Chapter XI

I FELT better—more as though it really was my birthday—as Dahmbahlah fell farther and farther behind us, and we entered the deep, almost untravelled forests which lay between us and King Dahndai's Zimi. My thoughts returned, though, to Boima Que's warnings as the constantly flashing cutlasses of the boys broke trail ahead of us. We were entering the wild country, the country which Boima Que had told us was inhabited by untamed natives with little love for the white man, and soon we would reach M'bahmabala, the town where Walahdu lived, the powerful witch doctor who was engaged in a jealous feud with King Dahndai and who hated all white men, with their religion and medicine which discredited his power.

As four o'clock came and the sun began to sink behind, making our shadows blue and grotesquely long in front of us when bits of light seeped through the mat of green above, we were still in the forest and had not once, since we left Dahmbahlah, seen a man or a sign of human life. The trail we followed was old and thickly overgrown. Clusters of vines and broken limbs hung down densely above us, and often as the line of boys wound along we would have to stop for minutes at a time while Flumo and Jalla-Boe, who walked ahead with cutlasses, hacked a new

path around some tree that a storm had flung across the trail. It was slow work and very tiring; but there were an abundance of game and bands of monkeys which continually fled before us or scampered about chattering shrilly in the trees above, so that it wasn't dull.

When five o'clock came and we still had seen no signs of natives, I began to worry. It was evident that we could not hope to reach Zimi that night, but what town would we reach? An opening in the roof of leaves that a fallen tree had made showed a stormy sky and wet grey clouds rolling down from the north. There was no doubt that rain would come before dark, and I did not look forward to a dripping, cold night unsheltered in the bush.

While the boys were cutting a passage around the tree Vahnee and I, who stood a little behind them, heard a squeaking noise in the branches above us, and looking up saw a small red squirrel scamper for all he was worth from the bush on the right across the path to the left of us. We watched rather absently as he chattered out of sight, and then suddenly both of us looked at each other. Vahnee opened his mouth and snapped a finger. And suddenly I remembered that I had been seeing this for hours—small animals and birds, proceeding rapidly across the trail—always from the right to the left, as if they were fleeing a constant danger.

With a quick word to Flumo putting him in charge and telling him to keep on at the same pace with the boys, we slipped off to the right and disappeared in the undergrowth, leaving the boys alone on the trail we had been following. With a caution seldom used on anything but elephants the two of us crept along on a course running almost parallel to our former course, but bearing a little to the south. We soon came upon a well-worn and freshly cleared path. We had expected to find it and, taking a careful look in both directions, started off to the east again. The new trail ran parallel to the old one. Faintly to the left

we could hear the click of the boys' cutlasses as they cleared the way around the fallen tree.

Five minutes later, passing down a rocky slope, Vahnee suddenly bent forward and picked up a crushed beetle. It was squashed flat and seemed dead, but he laid it in the palm of his hand and breathed on it a moment. Then we both looked carefully; the legs moved a little; it was not yet dead. Only a few minutes before it had been stepped on. A thorough search of the ground nearby showed the faint imprint of a bare foot, a bit farther another. In a muddy spot where water from a pool had dried, three sets of tracks were clear and distinct. They were short, leisurely steps. It was all as we had so recently guessed. We were being followed, and undoubtedly had been for some time. Now we crept forward more cautiously than ever, knowing it was most important that we get a look at those who were spying on us.

A mile from the place where Vahnee had picked up the beetle we heard the distant whisper of rushing water and fifteen minutes later we came to a shallow, swift-running stream. It was fifty or more feet across, and the trees did not meet above it. The opening showed a narrow sweep of storm-darkened, drizzly sky; the air in the open was cool and damp with the smell of near rain. A breeze had come up and the trees along the banks were bending, the leaves quivering nervously with their light sides turned to the sky. I started down to the water but stopped quickly when Vahnee suddenly motioned me back into a thicket. I ducked in and a second later he crawled to my side.

"They're over there behind that cotton tree. I heard them!" he whispered excitedly, and pointed out through the leaves to the sloping mudbank across from us.

A minute of taut silence passed. My eyes ached, and behind each shimmering leaf I tried to make out a man. Unconsciously I fingered my holster. Vahnee squatted like a brown stone statue beside me.

"There! There, Massah, in the thicket below the tree!" he whispered.

I looked toward the thicket and saw the leaves begin to move against the wind, and a moment later the tall black figure of a man slid out between them. He wore a monkey-skin loincloth and carried a short steel spear; he looked sharply about and then started to walk slowly toward the edge of the stream. Almost to it, he stopped again. He seemed to be listening for something; he kept turning his head and looking off past us in the direction of the old trail. A full three minutes he stood there listening and then he turned and uttered a low, birdlike cry. The leaves began to rustle again and two more men walked out. One was young like himself and carried a spear, but the other—and I could not take my eyes off him—was old and grey and withered as time itself. He had black piggish eyes and long, thin, flabby arms—the arms of an aged man once thick with muscle, but now wrinkled as though dried over a fire. They hung almost down to his knees. One of his skinny legs was deformed and dragged in a little limp. A mangy leopard skin was fastened about his shoulders, flapping down over his middle, and in his right hand he clutched a gold-handled tail of an elephant.

When the old man and younger one had come up to where the first stood they stopped and looked, as he had before them, toward the old trail. They listened too, and then the first man shook his head and started to speak. Though they were just across the stream from us I could hear nothing he said, and Vahnee, when I glanced at him, shrugged his shoulders and kept listening. The first seemed to be angry about something, but suddenly the old fellow cut him short and, waving the elephant tail impatiently, started to speak himself, swinging it and pointing back along the path with each word that he spoke.

Vahnee's head darted swiftly to my ear and his whisper was so low that I could scarcely make out his words.

"I cannot tell," he whispered. "They talk of the fetish of the Leopard Society, but whether they are leopard men or not I do not know."

I think my heart stopped beating as he said it, for I had heard many tales of the Leopard Society. It is one of the oldest bush organizations in Africa, and one of the most secret. Each unit of the society has a fetish, a skull, a human hand, an egg, and every member feels that he derives strength from contact with it. But to keep the strength alive the fetish must be refreshed from time to time with human blood. A human sacrifice must be offered and the blood smeared on the sacred relic.

I had heard, too, that they were cannibalistic, eating the palms of the hands, the soles of the feet, the liver (which they believed to be the seat of the soul) and the forehead of their victim, that they might derive from them the strength of his hands, the swiftness of his feet, the goodness of his soul and the wisdom of his head.

Was I their intended quarry?

I had little time to wonder, for suddenly the three became very quiet, and I watched them with a horrid fascination, unable to move or think clearly.

A low bird whistle sounded behind us—a whistle I had been hearing all morning!—and the next moment it was answered by one of the younger men. From the trail, not more than eight feet to the side of us, still another man appeared, carrying a large, bulging fibre bag over his shoulder. As he started across the stream, a few scattering drops of rain fell. The old man, looking up into the sky, started to shake the elephant tail and, shouting "Hurry!" with each jerky motion of his arm, limped, with such speed that it startled me, down to the edge of the water.

Then things happened very fast, so fast, in fact, that until they were over I hardly realized what had happened. The fourth stranger had almost reached the shore when a cloud above us seemed to burst. Water literally flooded down, and the old man, after

pulling a blood-smeared fetish bag from beneath the leopard skin, began to fumble with it, shouting and waving the tail round his head like a demon. Just as he was about to reach out and take the bundle from the man in the water Vahnee suddenly sprang to life.

"The bag! We must get it—quick!" he yelled, and jumping from the thicket started to splash across the stream.

I can never forget the look on those four natives' faces. Fast as the rain was falling they still came through it; four twisted heads, four gaping faces, four pairs of eyes that seemed to pop from the storm itself! The men, for a moment, were startled beyond motion. But then they gathered their wits and I saw one lift his spear. As he did I fired the pistol, and in that instant they seemed to vanish from the shore.

The big bag lay half in the water, and as Vahnee stumbled toward it I jumped from the wet green thicket and ran after him. He was twenty feet from it, his arms outstretched and his legs churning as though his life depended on his reaching it, when from seemingly nowhere the old man appeared again.

He just seemed to spring from the bush, and he, too, arms outstretched, was grabbing for the bag. I fired twice into the air again and he stopped. We stared at each other a moment, and while Vahnee sprawled face-first in the water he lurched forward once more. I fired in the mud at his feet this time, and he looked at me fiercely. Look is not the word though—his eyes felt like calloused fingers gouging back into my head. There was a pause that I thought would never end!—and then he turned and with two lightning-like hops was gone.

He had not really seemed to move. He just turned and there were jumps and then there was no one there. The green had swallowed him; it had reached out and swished, and then Vahnee and I were all that were left—Vahnee and I and a bulging fibre bag that half-floated on the water.

We both stood above it. The rain swept down, and we stood there and did not move. Unconsciously we waited; at the moment I did not know for what. A drum boomed out before us and another one answered faintly from the side. Vahnee touched the bundle with his foot. He looked at me a moment, a small frown clouding his face, and then stared at the unopened bag. Neither of us spoke. I refilled the clip and slipped it back into the pistol. The rain fell and the drums rolled on in a steady ominous roar. The water lapped noisily about our feet.

"What is in it?" I asked after an age had passed, and wondered as soon as I had if I really wanted, at the time, to know.

He glanced at the bag a moment and laid his hand on it, then hesitated. He looked up quickly.

"There's no time to see now, Massah," he said, and added, frowning again, "It was not meant for you, but for me or one of the boys. You follow this trail. I would not leave you, but I must warn the boys. I'll go to them. We will meet in the town. It cannot be far ahead."

He had picked up the bundle and was swinging it over his shoulder. When it was settled comfortably, he walked over very close to me and held out his hand.

"If it were meant for you, Massah, I would kill them all tonight, but," he smiled and snapped my finger, "it is not. Even here they fear to think of that."

He turned quickly and was splashing up the stream. He slipped into the forest and was gone. He made no sound; only the drums and the rain and the water were speaking. I stood a moment longer looking after him. I felt naked and alone. I started up the trail slowly. Night was near.

As the forest trail widened at the edge of the town it was dark and no people wandered among the huts. It was dark and deathly silent, and Vahnee had not yet arrived. Behind me came the sound of ceaseless

dripping from the rain-soaked forest. I waited for a moment at the outer rim of huts and then called, and my voice, laden with fear and helplessness, sounded like that of another person. There was no answer, and I called again in a frenzy. Still there was no answer. I had only my cutlass and my automatic. Holding one in each hand, I walked hesitantly into the town. Fire flickered behind the bamboo door of a large hut near the centre of the town, and I walked falteringly up to it. The rain had slackened to a drizzle, and my feet swished noisily with each step. I rapped on the flimsy woven door of split bamboo, and the squawking of chickens was the only sound that came back. The drums had stopped suddenly, and now the dripping of the rain seemed uncommonly loud. Peering between two bamboo slats I made out the gloomy shapes of several men sitting in the shadows behind a fire. The smell of smoke burned in my nose. A shiver made my scalp tingle.

"Come out and show me a hut or I'll kick the door in!" My voice was raised in bravado to quiet my fear. But the words sounded empty and echoed hollowly through the town. Nothing happened, and I took a swing at the mat with my cutlass. There was a mumble inside and more squawking.

"Come out," I sobbed.

I turned quickly. A man had laid his hand on my shoulder. He was tall and very husky, and the shafts of light made his black oily body shine like polished wood.

"Follow; the hut is here," he said in a voice that made me tremble, for it was cold and unfriendly. Then he turned and started away and I walked after him.

The hut he led me to was a small musty-smelling one with a roof that leaked and a feeble fire flickering on its mud floor. The man pulled aside an old mat and pointed in.

"There," he said thickly and started to walk away.

I grabbed him frantically by the arm. I wanted to cry, but I dared not do anything save show how brave I was.

"Look here," I shouted, and the trembling which had assailed me stopped, "is this the custom in your country? Do strangers always get the worst hut, no food, and no water? Give me a decent place and act as a headman or chief or whatever you are should, or there'll be trouble! I'll pay you for it; you don't have to worry about that."

The man looked rather perplexed. He rubbed a hand across his eyes.

"That is what you get," he said slowly and started to turn again. I walked in front of him.

"What is this?" I asked, trying to be calm, but finding it very difficult. "We didn't come to see you or have anything to do with you. We came to see Dahndai, and we'll be gone in the morning. Don't make trouble you will be sorry for. Just give us what you would any strangers, and we'll be satisfied."

"I will not," the man said evenly, and, turning, walked quickly into the darkness.

I started after him, but took only a few steps. He was gone, and I could not even hear the swish of his feet. I walked through the opening and sat down on the floor before the fire. I looked about the hut, and the more I looked the angrier and more frightened I became. This was a foul, dirty insult! The shelter had been used to keep goats and chickens in—quite recently they had been kept in it! It stank and the floor was covered with filth. Suddenly I jumped up in a frenzy and dashed out into the town.

The distance to the large hut where the men had not answered was covered at a run. They were still inside, for I could see them through the cracks, but I did not even bother to knock. I was acting without reason, driven to near-madness by uncertainty and fear. I banged into the bamboo door, and it broke open. I stood in front of them; in the gloomy light and excitement I did not see their faces. About twenty chickens

lay with their feet tied on the floor by the fire. I saw only these, and walking over to them picked one up and pulled its head off. It bounced about, and picking up four more I wrung their necks in the same fashion. Then throwing five shillings on the dust before the men—chickens cost only threepence each—and gathering up the flapping chickens, I started out the door.

"That will take care of our food," I muttered half-aloud, and then suddenly looked back at the men.

What made me turn I don't know, but somehow I felt I must. The chickens were in my left hand, and with my right I clutched the butt of the automatic in the holster. A man, and I saw at once he was the husky fellow who had led me to the dirty hut, had jumped up and, arms raised, was stumbling toward me. In the dimness of the hut and the fevered state of my imagination, he seemed twice the size of any man I had ever seen. With a choking gasp, I slipped down the safety catch and without even pulling the pistol out of the holster fired three rapid shots through it down into the mud at my feet. He stopped short, then suddenly ran past me, followed by three other men. I did not try to stop them; I was more than relieved that they were gone. I dropped the chickens and turned back to the fire.

But instead of being alone I found that there was still another person in the hut. When I saw who he was my heart gave a sudden jump. He sat calmly, his chin in his hands, staring into the fire as though I were not there and three ear-splitting shots had not just thundered out. He was old and withered. A bag was about his waist, and a leopard skin hung down off his shoulder. He was the creature I had seen by the stream, the old man I had driven away from the bag with my pistol. He rose slowly and limped over to where I stood. He did not look into my eyes, but held his head down. For a minute we stood in awkward silence. Finally I spoke.

"Now, tell me what this is all about—I don't quite

follow," I began rather hoarsely, and then, finding that words came more easily than silence, went on with a surer voice. "We haven't come here to bother anyone; in fact, I don't even know who you people are. All we ask is the tribal respect you would give any stranger. First, you spy on us, and then give me a hut that goats have been kept in. And what was all that palaver at the stream about? Who are you people that you don't even know bush manners?"

I paused and took a breath. The man had not moved. He gripped the elephant tail tight in his hand.

"Is this some of Walahdu's work?" I asked hotly. "Is it he who is trying to drive us from the bush? Does he think he can frighten me with foolish talk about killing friends of Dahndai!"

The man did not move. I began to feel a bit uncomfortable. I wished frantically that Vahnee and the boys would come. What was keeping them? They should have been here half an hour ago. But what if . . . I tried to drive any uncomfortable thoughts from my mind. And yet they kept coming back.

Suddenly I felt weak and tired and sick all over. The bloody, skinless neck of a chicken at my feet made my stomach tighten, and a wave of nausea swept over me. The smell of burned gunpowder made my eyes sting, and all at once my head began to swim. My lip quivered and I thought I was going to cry at last. I felt completely beaten.

That morning when we had taught Zuahna a lesson in respect, it had seemed absurd that this was only my nineteenth birthday. I had felt so much older than that—assured and strong. Now I felt much younger than nineteen—a child, helpless and alone, instinctively thinking of his mother.

My lip began to quiver. Even my breath began to come in tight jerks. Steady! No time for that sort of thing. Talk, say something. Get your feet tight on the ground again! For heaven's sake don't let this man see what's inside you!

"Speak up, old bluffer!" I shouted, brushing a tear off my cheek and hoping a loud voice would hide it. "Who is this big talker, Walahdu? If you know him tell him we're here and say that I want to see him!"

The old man raised his head slowly and looked coldly into my eyes. Something in the way he did it made me feel more helpless.

"Do you know him?" I asked as evenly as I could, and then was almost afraid to hear the answer. Before it came, I knew what it would be.

"Yes, I know him better than all men," the old man said. Then he paused a moment: "I am Walahdu."

There followed a dead, seemingly endless silence. Our faces close together, we looked deep into each other's eyes.

And then he moved away. I took a quick step forward, but he was through the door.

I walked to a pile of mats by the fire. I sat heavily down on them and put my face in my hands. The rain clicked clock-like from the thatch—there was a leak somewhere and cold drops pattered down on my neck.

It could not have been long afterward that I opened my eyes to see Vahnee kneeling in front of me. The large bag was on the floor at his side, and I saw it even before I saw the worried look on his face. Flumo and the other boys stood behind him. His voice came as though through thick mist.

"Did he hurt you, Massah? Did he come with other men?"

I shook my head and took a drink from the flask which he held out. Then I told him what had happened and he told me their story. Men had stopped them. There had been bluffing on both sides; Vahnee's bluff had been better. It had taken time, but finally the men had given up and disappeared into the forest. He did not know why they were there or from what tribe they came. They had spoken in

Mendi, but the language was not their own. He said he thought they were Kpeses, but could not be sure. Then, when he had finished speaking, there was a minute of silence. He looked at me, and the boys looked too; I looked back at them, and we all had the same thought, though none of us seemed anxious to speak it. Slowly our eyes turned toward the bag. Again there was a pause. Vahnee cleared his throat. He pulled the bundle over across his knees and while the boys stared at it wide-eyed he looked up.

"I am sure it was not meant for you, Massah," he began slowly. "Perhaps not for any of us, but someone here in this bush was to die tonight."

But then he stopped speaking and quickly started to untie the rattan knots round the opening of the bag. When they were off he looked up again. All the boys looked up and ever so slightly pressed forward and a little closer to one another. Each seemed glad of the other's presence, but they showed it only by the slow move forward. The fire flickered and cut jagged shadows on the grey walls. The rain dripped dully, and the smell of sweat and smoke hung heavy in the hut. Vahnee paused once more.

"I think . . . but we must wait and see. Dahndai will be able to tell us," he said, and then with a quick lift shook the contents of the bag on to the floor between us.

When I saw what was in it my heart almost stopped beating. A cold feeling came into my stomach, and a slow, bluntly piercing wedge of frozen steel seemed to slide up into my head. I could not breathe at first, and when when I did, my eyes stung and my nose felt as though soda water were squeezing through it.

On the floor before us was an old and very large leopard skin. Along the edges where it had been cut, pieces of raffia string were tied, running down the belly and out on either side of the legs. They fastened in pairs, each opposite another on the far edge of the skin, so that when slipped over a man they could be tied together, completely covering him. Instead of

paws, where the front feet had been were two sets of crudely forged iron claws. They looked not unlike leopard claws excepting that they were longer and made more like iron gloves. A man's hand could be slipped into them, and the force and result of a blow from these spear-edged talons was not hard to imagine.

Besides the skin with its claws there was the withered, dried hand of a child, a short, extremely sharp dagger, and the upper part of a human skull. The latter was covered by a tight-fitting lid of wood, which Vahnee prised off with the dagger. Inside were chunks of dark, greasy flesh and several fetishes wrapped in leaves and coated with black, sticky blood. The things in the skull had a most unpleasant smell, and the suspicion that the flesh was that of some unfortunate person made the sensation even more revolting. The lid was quickly tapped back in place, and then we all sat and looked at one another. Vahnee must have known what was in the bag all the time, but to the boys and to me the knowledge of what it held came as an awful shock. Whether we liked it or not we were now involved with the most feared and least known body of West African natives, the Human Leopard Society.

As we sat there staring quietly at the pile of strange things before us, I knew that the best and most sensible thing to do was get out of that bush as soon as possible. Even if this had nothing whatever to do with us, I knew it was not the time to meddle. That the men were not out to kill any of us I felt quite sure. If they had been, they would have done it when they had their chance. But whom were they after? And what did we have to do with their plan?

My wondering was suddenly stopped by a cry from outside the hut. A terrified cry, clear and loud above the dripping rain.

"Massah, come! They will kill me, too!" The words had come, and it was Kodah's voice that cried them. Kodah was one of Vahnee's boys and had been with us since the first trip. He had gone out for water—

that was just after we had put the lid back on to the skull!—and until now no one had noticed that he had not returned.

In a jump we were through the door, Vahnee with a rifle, and I clutching the automatic pistol, while the boys, waving cutlasses and spears, followed close behind us. We must have been a wild sight—a laughable sight to the person who had played us so puppetlike! Down at the west end of the town two torches waved back and forth, and as we dashed toward them the cry came again. It was Kodah all right, and something was happening to him. But then I suddenly thought of the bag we had left unguarded and stopped. The others dashed past. Vahnee and the boys would take care of him—if there was anything to take care of. I ran back toward the hut as fast as I could. A hundred yards from it I saw Walahdu duck out from another hut and start toward the hut where we had left the bag. He limped, but his gait was that of shattered lightning. Even as I ran I saw that he would reach the hut first.

But it didn't matter, for when we were still fifty feet away the broken door of our hut swung out, and the figure of a man was silhouetted in the flickering light. He held something in his arms, and he paused a moment and looked back as we came on. Then he jumped down to the ground; I fired wildly as he did. We came to the hut and it was empty. The skin and the bag with the dagger and human fetishes were gone. We had been neatly drawn aside. I cursed, and then looked at the old witch doctor.

"You are a fool—a white fool—who cannot think in silence!" he snarled.

He looked at me a moment, his eyes white and his rims of bare gum open to the fire. Then he hopped through the door. I shook my head and walked over to the pile of cloths. When Vahnee and the boys came in there was nothing to say. They all had realized as soon as they saw Kodah. He was tied up and he had been beaten. His captors had frightened him, and we



Native woman with child on her back

all had acted just as they wished us to. Everything had gone perfectly—for them.

But in the few minutes Vahnee had been outside he had discovered what had really happened—partly through words of the villagers, partly through his own deduction. During most of that day we had been followed by members of the Human Leopard Society, who had probably been looking for an opportunity to kill one of our boys as a sacrifice to their fetish. And Walahdu and his men, whom we had thought were the ones for us to fear, had actually stopped the leopard men—not through any love for us, but because of some quarrel of their own, something which we never did get straightened out.

Somewhere in the forest that day, when we had been going quietly and laboriously along our trail, there had been death near by, for Walahdu's men had killed one of the leopard men and taken their bag and their fetish from them. But the attack on Kodah had been by one of the leopard men themselves who had used that ruse to get us away from the bag while another member of the society recovered it. Thus, through our stupidity, we had undone the work which Walahdu had done.

As I went to sleep a few minutes later it was hard to realize that it was still my nineteenth birthday. So much had happened—so many confusing things! I felt that at least a year had passed; a year of no sleep and no food and strangely-acting people. Were they all crazy and we the only sane ones? I shivered and closed my eyes. A man with a limping leg hopped across my dreams.

Chapter XII

BEFORE it was dawn we were up. We wanted to get away from M'bahmabala as quickly as possible. Not a sound came from any of the huts as we made our preparations to depart and not a face appeared at the doors as we started out of the village and down the trail. Two boys had been sent ahead to tell Dahndai that we were coming. Now we hurried, to put Walahdu's village far behind us as quickly as possible.

Halfway to Zimi we had to pass through another village, where the people took one look at me and then ran screaming into the bush. They had seen very few white men.

It took some time for Vahnee to persuade them at least to come out where they could see me better, and finally they began to creep toward me: men with their spears and cutlasses held ready in their hands, women clutching their babies to their breasts, and little boys and girls clinging shyly to the older one's legs with a look of fear mingled with uncontrollable curiosity in their faces. This queer, unhealthy-looking man-shaped creature might kill us, they seemed to say, but a look at him was worth the risk. I stood quietly in the centre of the open palaver house as Vahnee had told me to, and for fully fifteen minutes I did not move a muscle. Gradually they came closer, and finally one old woman touched my bare shoulder, and then looking at her

finger carefully smelled it. She touched me again and licked her finger this time. Then she frowned and looked back at the others, perplexed.

"He is not raw," she murmured slowly. "The white man has skin. How strange! And yet it is a different skin—not so soft, and with hair upon it. His arms are like the chimpanzee's!"

That seemed to be the signal to come forward. The old woman had braved me and nothing had happened. I was harmless and really not so violent as they had first supposed. Now they all came up for a "touch" and some even a "taste," for they licked my hands while others felt me from head to foot. My beard, they decided, they did not like, and so when they asked me to take it away and let them see what was hidden beneath, I surprised them all by calling for hot water and, after clipping it off, shaving the whole business clean. They were tremendously impressed and when it was time for us to go on to Zimi they begged us to stay longer. They had satisfied themselves that white men, too, had skin and were not just large pieces of raw meat walking about in the bush—this I found always to be the belief among natives who had seen few white men; they believe that all skin must be brown or black—and they had satisfied themselves that white men were not too deadly to deal with, but now they wanted one more thing. They asked me to take my clothes off and let them see if in all ways I was constructed as their men were. But just as I was about to show them that there was really only a difference of colour between us, a hawk flew over and when I dropped it with a shot they lost all interest in my person, for they were entranced by the "magic gun." It held them speechless while other hawks were brought down, and then finally they let us go on our way. They followed us halfway to Zimi, and we *dashed* them tobacco and salt and cloth when they turned back. The friendship in that "savage" village was genuine. Later they proved it many times over both to me and to the doctor when he came back.

About noon we walked into Zimi, and Dahndai, with a fitting king's retinue, greeted us. He was all that I had expected and hoped he would be: a fine man, a great chief and a proud old warrior. He looked his ancient age, but in spite of his bent body and trembling hands and bleary, bloodshot eyes, I could feel definitely the power and the strength and the patience that his years of serving and leading his people had given him. He held his white head high, his eyes met mine squarely and with friendliness, and I felt some unseen, unspoken power in the air about him, a sense of greatness of spirit that moved where he moved and made me feel that I was in the presence of a great leader.

Our conversation was short and to the point. There were many people in Zimi and his outlying towns, he said, who were sick, and all his country was in need of meat. His hunters had no money to buy powder for their guns, and the rice crop had not been a good one. There was trouble with Walahdu, and the man was now trying to stir up trouble among his people. If I could help him in any way he would be happy, but, regardless, I was still welcome to stay in his town.

I told him that I had already had the pleasure of meeting his witch doctor, Walahdu, and that we had had a slight difference of opinion. Dahndai smiled and told me that he had heard about it. News travels fast in the jungle. I suggested that it might be a good thing to ask Walahdu to come in to Zimi for a conference and offered to send Vahnee himself back with the runners to get him, since it would not be good manners to send only a common runner after a man of as high station as Walahdu. Dahndai was pleased and we agreed that perhaps with the co-operation of the witch doctor we might learn more about the recent activities of the Leopard Society, so Vahnee was sent off and I, after assuring Dahndai of my willingness to help him in any way I could, went into the big clean hut which he had given me.

As I lay resting on my deep reed-filled bed I

gradually became aware of a low whispering and mumbling outside my door, interspersed by scuffling and giggling. I called out, "Who's there?" and then sat up hurriedly when three of the prettiest young girls I'd ever seen walked in and sat down shyly on my bed.

For a moment we sat in a rather embarrassed silence, and then one of them, who seemed to be the leader, said calmly:

"We are your new wives. King Dahndai has sent us as *dashes* because he likes you."

I have never felt so stupid in my life. I just sat and stared at them, but I could feel my face and neck getting uncomfortably hot.

The girls enjoyed it hugely. The redder I got the more they laughed.

"You are two colours," one of them giggled, "and it is true that white men haven't any skin. But there is something there," she added as she touched my face tentatively with one finger.

This was a serious problem, and I knew it. To send them back to Dahndai would be a bush insult of the worst order. One wife was a gift bestowed on only a chosen few of a great chief's friends and guests. But he, for some reason, had thought me worthy of three! I felt honoured, but on the spot.

The "wives" began to muss my hair and utter joyous little exclamations about its strange softness. Then the leader, as she pinched my cheek, said, "I am your head wife. I'll be a fine wife and cook good food. Do you like me?" and she smiled coyly at me and cuddled against my side.

"Yes," I answered weakly. "You're very nice, very pretty, but——"

Something had to be done about this in a hurry!

What I did may not have been dignified but it was safe! I jumped for the door and, followed by mocking giggles, I made for Dahndai's compound. As we sat around his fire talking we each kept up the rather doubtful pretence that I had just dropped by for a

friendly chat; he with some wonderment, I imagine, and I in desperation. At last the conversation seemed to drift to a discussion of my country, our life there, our customs, our tabus. No comparisons were drawn too sharply, no distinctions made too closely; but I managed, without mentioning the three charming wives whom he had given me and who were now waiting in my hut, to tell him, casually, as a general statement and a contribution to a general conversation which had nothing to do with any specific incident, that in our country we had one wife and that it was tabu, whether we were at home or abroad, to take more.

He listened gravely and with interest and complete friendliness, and the talk drifted to other matters. But not before he had called a man to him, and whispered in his ear, and the man had quietly left us.

When I left him a few minutes later and returned to my hut by a roundabout way, my three wives were gone. There was still a depression in the bed where they had been sitting.

The next afternoon Vahnee and the boys returned with Walahdu and a great palaver started. It lasted three days, and when it was over the spear of war was buried. The whole matter had begun over who was to have the last word in certain matters of state, and when it ended both men were satisfied. The old witch doctor had overstepped his power and was only too glad to get back into the graces of Dahndai without losing face. This he did—or, better, this Dahndai let him do, knowing that it was wiser to have peace in his forest and go without revenge himself than take his pound of flesh and run the risk of another split-up.

But my relations with Walahdu were never friendly. He could never forgive me for letting the leopard men escape with what he had so dangerously taken from them.

When I offered to go back into the mountains and hunt game for Dahndai, Walahdu objected violently. If any people were to shoot for the king, he said, he

and his hunters would be the oncs. So I said that by all means they should go and I gave them powder for their guns, together with silver and tobacco to offer their gods, and they went off. They returned with practically nothing. Then Vahnee and I with our trackers went out. We were very lucky; we returned with more meat than they had seen at one time in years. And I'm sure that Walahdu would have liked to kill me.

But our greatest conflict came when I attempted to help some of the natives with medicine. It was bad enough to have someone meddle with his magic means of providing meat, but when the white fool interfered with his main source of income—that of making charms for persons into whom an evil spirit had come to dwell—he no longer let it pass with only an angry growl. He threatened to cast a death spell on me and all the boys.

For the very sick among Dahndai's people of course I could do nothing; I had to content them with promises of the coming visit of the "great doctor from the coast." The many bad cases all made me heart-sick, but I could do nothing but ease their pain occasionally. Most of my work was with malaria, dysentery, worms and infected sores. I could make a try at curing these and also teach the natives simple methods of sanitation and hygiene. But even this was frowned upon by my competitor and we bickered constantly during my two weeks' stay.

One case in particular made my heart ache. It was that of a boy—not more than twenty-five at the most—whose body was covered with sores and who had not been able to walk, the people told me, in almost twenty years. His legs were nothing but festered, tight-stretched skin over bone, and he dragged himself around on his seat using his hands to push with. His buttocks were hard calluses, and he spent most of his time shooing flies off the numerous pussy ulcers. But he was the most cheerful and one of the finest fellows I have ever met.

Konki was the boy's name, and we became close friends. We often drew pictures together at sunset (he loved coloured pencils) and then in the night, if we were in Zimi, Vahnee would carry him to our hut, or I would go to his. He always asked me to tell him stories and—how ironical!—he loved most those of the bush and elephant hunting. His bush!—he had never been outside the town. A tiny bit of money—the cost of three tins of cigarettes—and the skill of one man could change his life and others like his from a dragging, unbelievable hell to something beautiful beyond thought!

But I could do nothing for Konki save be his friend and promise him that, if I could, I would bring the wonder-working doctor from the coast to cure him.

Zimi is built in a valley between two densely wooded ridges. Toward the coast lie the first rolling hills of the Gola country, and behind rise the steep, guarding mountains which fence off the northern edge of Kongbah. One mountain, particularly, I wanted to see. It is the highest of the group, and often from the piazza of the big stone house on the coast I had watched it. It seems to be the master of them all, for it curves up into a gracefully rounded green peak and stares down on miles of silent forest below. If I could reach its top I could look out over Kongbah and see what lay beyond the hidden side.

Several times I had asked Dahndai to tell me more about the haunted forest, but his answer was always a grunt and a solemn headshake. "Never go into it," was all that he would ever say. Now, as it was the twentieth of December and we had planned to start for the coast the next day in order to reach the mission in time for Christmas, I realized that this would be my last chance to see the mountain for some time to come. Three hunters from a river village of the king's over near the Sierra Leone border had come in that morning asking us to shoot meat for them, so I took that excuse and, together with Vahnee and an old slave to

guide us, started with them back along the two-hour trail toward the mountain.

Game of all kinds was plentiful, and by the time we had reached an old deserted slave town at the base of the climb all that the men could use had been shot and we sent them back, the three of us pausing to rest among the ruins of the huts.

It was a forsaken and lonesome spot; since the last war seven years before no one had lived there, and very few people had even passed through. The houses were crumbling and bent over as though the empty stillness and burden of deserted years had been more than they could shoulder. From their grey, sagging thatch roofs rows of small trees grew, and here and there scattered through the thicket-filled streets lay broken gourds and rusting iron cutlasses and battered, worm-eaten rice mortars. In one of the huts a pot hung tilted over what once had been a fire hole near the centre of the room. In it, withered and brown, were dried stalks of rice that had grown up, then died and fallen back to turn to earth. It was as though men had been there one moment, sitting in the streets laughing and talking, their women preparing the evening meal, and then, at the wave of a hand, had been suddenly lifted away never to return. Their town was the jungle's now. Soon there would be only little vine-covered mounds with trees reaching out above. A forest would hide all again and, as in death, the town and its people would be forgotten.

The utter stillness and desolation of the place depressed me. A feeling of sadness and defeat, of something lost and never to be gained again, was all about us. As we started up the steep winding trail of the mountain I wondered, as I had so often before, at the unyielding relentless power of the bush. It never gave in, it never let up for a moment; it was always creeping forward, clutching at man-made things. I feared it, and yet it fascinated me, for it could not be halted. We could stay it for a brief day, but it would always reach back. It had come first, and it would be the last to go.

An hour and a half of hard climbing and crawling brought us to the top of the mountain. The bush was thick and matted all along the way, and not once as we went up had we been able to see off to the side or get a glimpse of the view which we knew was stretching off below us. It was disappointing; it always is in high forest country. You know that twenty feet from you there is a spectacular vista, but you'll never see it! An hour of cutting trees and vines will let your eyes through, but there is never time to stop. A strange thing about such country where you can see no more than a few feet in every direction is that the only way you can tell if you are going up or downhill is by the aching of your legs. You cannot see the slope of the ground and you only know that you are going up because you puff and your muscles feel like hot coals; going down you don't puff and the fiery pains no longer shoot up your legs.

On the top peak were the ruins of another town. Dahndai's father had lived here, but only little vine-covered knolls showed where his huts had been. The town had been burned by black slavers over eighty years before. While Vahnee and the guide started cutting openings through the trees I wandered about among the old graves and tried to imagine what it had been like in those days.

Slave ships running "Black Cargo" from Cape Mount on the coast, battles every other week, and lines of captives chained neck and hand marching sullenly down to the water to be traded for rum and salt and gunpowder. Towns burned and the thunder of war drums ever throbbing through the forest. Killing and the lust for gold and the burning waters of the white man. But very little had really changed. Only the greed and curses of Mungo John and his cut-throat mob from the Cubas had gone. The forest was the same.

We spent several hours on the mountain after we had cleared a bit of jungle so that we could see the valley below. It was the loveliest spot that I had ever

seen with range after range of soft green mountains stretching endlessly beyond us into the clear still air. I could stay here quite happily for a long time, I thought, and then Vahnec said, "Kongbah, over there," and pointed toward the east, and as I looked at the haunted forest lying far below me, I wanted terribly to go on.

But I knew that that would have to wait for another trip. After filling my eyes with the beauty that lay before them, and resolving to come back to it better prepared to enter its vastnesses, I turned reluctantly and followed the trail down the mountain.

At two the next morning we were ready to leave Zimi on our way to the coast. We were out to make a record trip. Dahndai gave me sixteen hammock men, and the whole town was there to see us off.

As Dahndai snapped fingers with me and said good-bye he gave me a large and very old elephant tusk as a trekking-away *dash*. It was a beautiful thing. I had admired it many times, and I was pleased and grateful for Dahndai's generosity. As I glanced up from admiring it, I saw Walahdu glaring at me and I knew that he was inwardly seething at this final display of the king's favour.

The old witch doctor had sulked throughout the evening's festivities and now he could restrain himself no longer.

"So you will go to the coast faster than other men go when they walk through the bush?" he shouted at me.

"I think so," I answered, not quite sure of what was in his mind.

"And you will run all this night and all tomorrow and all the next night?"

"That is our plan."

"Well, I say now, before all these people, that I will be in Madina before you are," he paused and laughed craftily, "long before you are, and I will not leave until sun-up, for I must make medicine at the feast."

He turned and walked back into the town. We

started, torch boys in the lead and *fangha* drummers marching along beside the hammock. The men jogged along at a good trot. Walahdu got to the river before we did? It was ridiculous!

We reached Binda-Jah late the next morning and paused only to change hammock men and get a bite of food. By night we had reached Mombo, and after another pause and shift of men were on our way for the second night. Early the next morning we reached the river at Madina, where we borrowed three large dugout canoes and loaded our gear into them. There was no sign of Walahdu; I hadn't expected there would be. The boys had made phenomenal time, and it was ridiculous to think that the old man could keep up with them, much less start hours later and then pass them.

We were just about to push off when the chief ran down to the water and told us to wait.

"There is a friend of yours here," he said. "He told me to wake him when you arrived. He came in last night—early last night."

He pointed up the bank, and our eyes followed his hand in amazement. The witch doctor stood there, his long arms hanging down and the gold-gripped elephant tail trembling in his hand. He stood a moment, silent, then turned and limped away, his harsh, sneering laugh floating back to us.

Chapter XIII

BACK at the coast I gave Dr. Junge messages from practically every village which I had visited. Would he come and heal their sick? Would he set up hospitals with the magic in them which made people well on the coast? From all Liberia rose the cry for help. Already he had established two medical stations in the Vai country and their fame had spread rapidly. King Dahndai, Zuahna and Boima Que had all promised to build dispensary huts in their towns and supply food for any people stationed there, if the doctor would come and show them what to do. And he wanted to go.

But it was several months later that we actually went.

I had meanwhile gone into the interior again, and when Dr. Junge was ready I met him at Mombo, a Vai town an hour from Kobolya.

It was a beastly hot day that we chose to walk back to Dahmbahlah. By noon, when we were well into the Gola country, I was ready to drop. Grinding ten-hour treks were old things to Vahnee and the boys and me, but a ten-hour trek with the doctor was something entirely new, and deadly! He took mammoth strides and had a habit of running down every hill he came to; then, just for the fun of it, I suppose, running halfway up the next. And from Mombo to Dahm-

bahlah is just one long, seemingly endless series of hills. I would have liked going to Binda-Jah first, for I had not forgotten my brush with Zuahna, but Zuahna was paramount chief and we did not wish to cause any complications by slighting him.

As usual, word of the doctor's coming had reached his destination long before he did. When we crossed the river and arrived at the first rim of huts the whole town was there to greet him. Seldom have I seen such a pitiful and, at the same time, inspiring picture. In an open place outside the town proper, some standing and others lying on the ground, were a large group of sick, crippled and diseased men, women and small children. As he came up they turned their faces toward him and then, as he walked over to meet Chief Zuahna, they crept forward silently and gathered about him, not speaking, but only looking deeply through eyes filled with hope—rather forlorn hope; hope almost burned out, disillusioned, unbelieving.

While I shook hands with the always stiltedly friendly Zuahna, the doctor wandered around among the sick, asking a question here, bending down to examine a cut or a fester, and pausing to laugh and pat a woolly head as he walked on. It was beautiful to see, and I soon forgot that I felt walked-out and found myself following him about, greeting old friends and realizing with a little jerk of surprise that my body no longer ached.

Only a word and the touch of a hand, a pause that takes but a second and a man's whole world was changed by hope.

"Yes—yes, you will be well. Before the new moon comes you will walk. Yes, you will even dance!"

He turned and moved toward the chief's compound. We followed him in silence, the boys and I and a hundred hopeful faces. Some of the sick were being carried and some limped along without help. In the eyes of all there was a new look; the look of hope. They had never felt it before, they had never dreamed that it existed. It was like a new sun that had come

to warm the world from behind a rain-chilled ridge of mountains.

He paused at the wall to look back; he smiled again and lifted his hand.

"Tomorrow. Tomorrow with the new sun."

Then he passed through the gate and out of sight. There came a murmur—no words but only a low whispered murmur. It was like the sound of water smoothing rocks in a stream.

Microscopes are most convincing things. There was a great deal of dysentery in Dahmbahlah, and on examining the water in the stream from which the people drank the doctor found it to be the main cause. A little farther away a spring ran out from a hillside; the water there was quite pure. When he told them to use it and not the stream water, they laughed, asking why they should walk farther when all water was the same. But when he let them bring water from both and then showed them the difference under the microscope they changed their minds, deciding that perhaps the pure water was worth the few extra steps. He finished up by explaining the reasons for it—he was a master at translating complicated science into simple native terms and making them see it clearly—and then showed them, under a microscope, the stool of a man with a bad case of dysentery. They were thoroughly convinced, now, and the chief made a law about where the water for the town was to be brought from.

In like ways he convinced them of other things. There were clusters of banana trees all through the town. Mosquitoes breed well in these, and after the doctor had shown the people how, and made them understand that the insects were responsible for their malaria—letting them see the malaria "worms" in their blood—the banana trees were cut down and new ones planted a good distance from their huts. In the same manner he had them clear the bush from about the town and showed them why it was necessary to

have the streets kept clean and free from filth and fly collectors; also all stagnant water was covered with oil or drained off when possible. The natives are naturally clean. Most of them bathe at least twice a day, and it is a disgrace for a person to come into a town without washing and oiling himself first. So, when shown why the same care should be taken with the places they lived in, it was not over-hard to make them see the point. It was difficult, though, to keep them seeing it.

In one village near Dahmbahlah the people were getting their drinking water from a pool in a stream two hundred yards below the place where their sewage drained into it. A look in the microscope at what they were drinking (they hardly needed that, but a microscope made it more alive!) brought disgusted "oh's" and "ah's," and the prompt decision that that was not to be done again. One man even went so far as to spit, while another, who had just taken a drink, managed to vomit. Then and there they vowed that the longer walk to a spot above the sewage place, though inconvenient, would without fail be taken from that moment on.

But three days later most of them were back in the old place again and the same thing had to be done over. They had forgotten; the picture had passed from their minds—"Besides, Massah, it is a very long walk to go above . . ."

The doctor chose a location and staked out the plan of the dispensary hut and living quarters, and then we started on back toward the deep Gola bush. Chief Zuahna was to have the poles up and the roof started when we returned.

I was as excited as a child going to a circus when we struck out on the trail for Binda-Jah. It was only an hour away, but Boima Que, though he had sent his greetings and gifts by his speaker, had not himself come down. His feud with Zuahna and the pride that went with it prevented such an act. Later, thanks to the doctor, things were straightened out.



French soldiers

Boima Que and his people gave us a rousing reception. They felt toward "the tall, tall man with deep, deep voice and magic ways" just as everyone else did. They took him in and would hardly let him go. He had a way with them that was indescribable.

But we could only stay a little while. The doctor worked among the people and told the chief how to take care of certain things—among them where to get his water!—and then we went on to Zimi. We took the new trail this time and met no Walahdus along the way. It was such a different feeling going back with someone else. It did not seem like the same country at all, but much more secure and even more fun; now I was bringing my "brother" to them. It was like taking someone into my own country—there was that proud feeling, almost of possession, and I felt, in a way, that the towns were mine and that I had discovered them.

They took him in there as they had at Binda-Jah and everywhere else. Dahndai leaned on his cane, shaking his grey head and saying "Ah!" as though *Kahmbah* himself had jumped down from the skies and stood before him. He was so pleased and excited that when I handed him an enlargement of a picture of himself made from a snapshot taken on the trip before, which my father had sent me, he folded it up and began tearing it into little pieces! I decided I had better wait with the other things until later. Walahdu had mysteriously left the town the day before on an unknown mission, but all the other powers were there, and though we missed him—I had particularly wanted him to see some real magic—his absence was not too painfully felt.

Of course, all the sick or ailing in the town were brought out at once, and everything from scratched fingers to eyes twenty years sightless was sympathetically examined and, if the doctor had with him the necessary equipment, treated. He arranged and himself made it possible for all those whom he could not help at the time to be carried down to the river where,

at his own expense, his canoes would be sent for them.

Konki was cured. When the doctor looked at him and said it could be done I felt as I had when I first climbed the high mountain and looked back over Kongbah; I could not breathe for a moment, and then all at once I wanted to laugh and cry and reach up into the clouds to tell them what had happened. Later, when I saw him and he walked toward me, the same feeling came again. I was not able to speak.

Chapter XIV

RETURNING to Cape Mount with Dr. Junge, I rested a few days. But still my mind was on Kongbah. Ever since Boima Que had told me the story of the haunted forest I had been unable to shake the thought of it from my mind, and even though the boys all told me that the signs were against a trip into the interior, I decided to start again as soon as possible.

Early one morning Vahnee and I and our ten best boys pushed off across the glassy bay, heading our four canoes up the *Mahfah* river toward Kobolya. It was a fresh, cool dawn, and a low mist, drifting up from the ocean behind us, settled along the winding stretch of water like the furry, white skin of a giant caterpillar. The paddles dipped and swished smoothly, and as we slid past the shadowed green of the palm-lined banks they looked like fantastically painted stage sets.

An hour out the sun rose and the canoemen began to chant. The river ran slowly; it was the middle of the dry season and the current was not strong. The chants grew louder and happier, and the boys forgot that their medicine had spoken gloomy warnings and joined in the song with the others. They were happy, for the trip had started well; the spirits had been only bluffing.

And then late in the afternoon when we were near -

ing Kobolya and the light was fading from the sky our first bad mishap came. The river had become very shallow in places and flowed down low in its banks. In spots there were swift-running rapids and deep churning pools. We had seen many crocodiles lying along the banks, and since our water trip was almost over and nothing very exciting had happened I thought it would be a good idea to shoot one. In the bush a dead crocodile is a sign for great rejoicing. The natives fear them as they do few other things that crawl or walk, and I knew that one of these demons cleanly killed would wipe all possible thoughts of bad luck from their minds.

Rounding a sharp turn Vahnee spied one sleeping on a sand bank a hundred yards ahead, and signalling the other canoes to stay back we glided slowly toward him. He was a good-sized fellow, well over twelve feet long, and he lay in the sand, his mouth stretched open and his long, pointed teeth showing a greenish yellow in the last streaks of sunlight. As we came in nearer I stood up in the bow of the canoe and the boys began to chant in high-pitched voices. When coming in close for a shot at a crocodile they always do this, and it seems to hypnotize the beasts, for they pay no attention to the men.

Thirty feet from the shore I pulled back the hammer on the .405. As we came within ten feet I raised the gun and aimed. The water was rough and the sight jerked about like a nervous turkey's head, and a sudden whirlpool caught us and shot the canoe fast toward him, almost throwing me off my feet. I pulled the trigger and saw a red splotch of flesh rip up jagged behind his eyes. His jaws came together with a loud clap, and he jumped almost into the boat. I fell half over him and scrambled onto the shore. The canoe capsized behind me, and with a shriek Vahnee and the two paddlers went into the water. The wounded crocodile thrashed about a moment like a broken belt on a turbine end, then churned into the water and disappeared. I had dropped the gun, and

stood there helpless and completely terrified. The tin boxes sank, the canoe floated off bottom side up, while the three other boats rushed helter-skelter toward us.

The boys towed the upset canoe in to shore, and for a terrible half-hour we took turns diving for the lost boxes and guns. Even though we fired shots into the water to drive away any stray crocodiles it wasn't exactly fun.

When it was too dark to try any more, we had recovered everything but a chop box containing all the tinned food and my camera. The food we could do without, but I felt keenly the loss of the camera. It was a very fine one, and, though I had another passable affair and a small movie outfit on the coast, I was crippled so far as good pictures were concerned throughout the rest of my stay in Africa.

Several hours after dark we reached Kobolya. After we'd gone to our huts, I heard the boys muttering for what seemed hours to me. Finally I got up and crept over to hear what they were saying. They sat around their fire in a grim-faced, frowning circle, listening to Flumo's dejected voice.

"And this is only the first bad spirit to visit us. The medicine says many will come," he said hopelessly. "And it says, too, that one man will die. We cannot tell who it will be, but one will surely die if we go on."

I turned back to my hut. The murmurs were swallowed behind me. I lay down on the cot, and for a long time stared at the dark poles across the ceiling. Bad spirits . . . more trouble to come . . . one man to die. . . . For an hour I weighed them in my mind. Of course they were foolish! No one could look into those things! And yet I had seen strange things happen—things bush medicine had foretold. But rot! One bad break shouldn't turn us back.

And then I slept.

Since our plan was to work back into the Kongbah bush, I had decided it would be a good idea to have Seahfah go on before us and pick up some ivory I had

left several months before with chief Sowkah in a distant town called Boporo. The ivory was the best that I had—one pair of tusks weighed over seventy pounds each—and I had left it with the chief for safe keeping. Knowing that someone might possibly try to get it with a forged note, the chief and I had agreed that unless the man who came had my .405 in hand he was not to be given it. Seahfah I knew I could trust. I gave him several pounds' worth of tobacco and salt as a *dash* for the chief, and a good supply of food and *dashes* for himself, and told him that we would follow the Boporo trail as far as Wie-Isse, and that he was to be there with the tusks when we arrived ten days later.

Seahfah said, "You are like a father to me—even more than that. You are like a father and a grandfather and all the good people of my clan! You have given me large *dashes* often; gunpowder, salt, tobacco and silver. Now you give them to me again, and also you let me use your big gun another time. All the people in the forest see what you have done for me and respect me because I am the white man's friend. I shall never forget these things. I go now to bring your ivory down and also to bring a *dash* for you. You are a very great man, and I am glad you let me be your chief hunter."

I said, "And I am glad you are my chief hunter. You have been a good one, and what I do is a very little thing. I trust you, Seahfah; I would let you use anything I have. Now, go and bring the ivory and we will meet you in ten suns on the trail coming back."

After he had touched the elephant gun to my feet and started, with his two young hunters, up the trail leading out of Kobolya, Vahnee said, "I do not trust Seahfah. You have done too much for him already and you have spoiled him. I know Seahfah better than you, and I would not trust him now with anything smaller than that big cotton tree above Kah-tumu's compound. Call him back before it is too late and——"

But I didn't let him go on. I was angry to think that Vahnee should question my judgment. I wanted to like and trust Seahfah. He was picturesque and looked and spoke and acted like an elephant hunter, or at least like my version of one. I liked him more for his deep voice and smooth-muscled body and blood-splotted hunting jacket than for his ability to hunt. So I said angrily, "You're as bad as the rest of them! I suppose some medicine you've made has told you this. Don't be a fool, Vahnee!"

For almost a week we travelled in the lower bush and everything, as the boys had predicted, went wrong. It was as though some evil cloud followed us to cast its shadow on each trail and village we touched. The chief of Kono, a man whom I knew well, sent word from his village to the north of Kobolya that one of his wives was sick and the bush doctors could not seem to help her. We went over, and I had no more than looked at the woman when she died. It was unfortunate for us as well as the chief. Some of the old people muttered that I had killed her, and the bush doctors of course made the most of my failure.

I realized I had lost the respect of the chief and I tried to get it back by offering to hunt for him. But though he gave us his best hunters and we all tried desperately for two days, we never spotted a thing save a few monkeys, which Mohammedan laws forbid the faithful to eat. And the town was Mohammedan. When we left we were not urged to return and no one bothered to see us off on the trail.

Two more days of trekking brought us into the M'balomah bush. I had not been there since that first elephant hunt with Simmonds. I had looked forward to seeing it again; everything would be all right there.

But M'balomah seemed to have changed. The people came out to greet us and went through the formal run of questions, but it was evident that they had little interest in us. Their crops were in and their bellies were full. They didn't need medicine, at least

none that I had, in spite of all my careful planning, and their hunters had powder for their guns. They took our *dashes* with hardly a smile and they seemed barely to notice us as we left them the next day.

I had heard that in Goo-Mah, a river village a day to the east of M'balomah, they needed meat. We would go there and hunt for them and everything would be all right. For I knew that unless we had a good break soon, the boys would refuse to go much farther into the bush. They were getting more sullen as each day bore out the prophecies of their medicine. And I was stubbornly set on going just as far as I could.

The first night in Goo-Mah convinced me that I was right, for the natives needed us and they needed food. Their bellies were not fat and satisfied, and they did not sit in their woven hammocks and gaze listlessly at us when we passed. They went to just the other extreme. Drums rolled and there was dancing all through the night, there were bush devil entertainers, and the best huts in town were prepared for us. This was something like it! My sadly deflated ego revived astonishingly as I listened to the story-teller chant about the great white man and his big, magic gun that would shoot many times and soon would fill their drying racks with meat.

The boys felt fine too, and we all set out to save face in a really first-class manner. There were no elephants in the vicinity, but hippopotami were plentiful, and that was what we were to shoot. That we might fail never entered my mind. The chief and his unspoiled people believed I could, there were hippos in a nearby river, and I had bullets for my gun. What could stop us? Nothing!

I had never seen or heard before of their way of hunting the animals. Because the hunters had shot at them often, they had become very wary and never showed up until after dark and in the early morning. They would stay in the water most of the day, sinking as soon as men came near them, but at night they

would come out on the cane flats of the river to feed. All through the flats, narrow, mucky paths wound, and along these the hippos would pass at night, eating the fresh green shoots and grunting and roaring like angry, ill-tempered lions.

I was told that if some of the high, dry cane was burned the beasts would come in the night to eat the blackened ashes which, the natives said, were their favourite food. It sounded too easy !

On the morning after our arrival Vahnee and I, together with six hunters and about twenty men, including the good-natured chief, started out. An hour from the town we came into the cane country and, after picking out a much-used run, followed it back from the river a hundred yards to where the river ran in a narrow channel between banks twelve feet high, and started cutting down the ten-foot stalks and throwing them on to a large fire. In half an hour there was a pile of ashes higher than my head. We left them to cool off and went back to the river. The work for the day was over. Now all we had to do was sit and wait until a lumbering hippo got hungry. That, I was assured, would not be until late in the night or early the next morning.

All through the rest of the morning and afternoon we sat on one of the ridges eating and talking and telling stories. Then at dusk one of the chief's medicine men came out and cast a spell over the run and the river near it so that one of the great water beasts would be sure to go back to the charcoal pile. This he did by taking some blood from my thumb and some from his and mixing them with the powdered ash of burned hippo meat which he carried in his medicine bag. Then we each ate a little of the foul stuff and spat down in the river, and he chanted a long lingo of mysterious words and spread the rest of the "magic" along the path leading to the ashes. As darkness fell we split into two groups—Vahnee, the chief and I with seven men on one side, and the witch doctor with the hunters and the rest on the other. There was

no need for any more than three of us to be there, but they had come to see a show as well as to get some meat. And I was glad they were there; I had never felt better and surer of myself, and I wished the whole country were there to see the fun.

At about ten o'clock it began to rain, and it drizzled all night long, until I was soaked to the bone, and the gun was drenched. When the first murky grey lights of dawn broke I was so stiff and sore and full of sniffles and sneezes I could hardly move. It was about three and we hadn't heard or seen a sign of the animals. As I peeked down on the path below I saw it was a quivering quagmire. I shivered and growled at the witch doctor that we might as well go back to town.

And then suddenly we heard a sound. Something was splashing out of the water down below us; something big that grunted as it slopped along, and it was slopping toward us! The shivers left me and I felt grand. I smiled at the witch doctor; he smiled back. I stood up and looked at the gun. All was in shape. The heavy splashing sound came nearer and none of us breathed or blinked.

As the animal came around the bend and started up the run beneath us my heart gave a funny jump. He was tremendous; he looked bigger than an elephant! His oily, fat sides bellied out and filled the path, and his broad, bulgy-eyed head looked like a row of Western saddles. I had a feeling that nothing in the world would stop him—not even a one-pounder. He grunted and slushed his steam-shovel mouth along in the muck, and I raised the gun to shoot. And then something went wrong with my feet. I slipped in the mud, and before I could catch anything I had sloshed down that soaking slimy river bank and was standing up to my knees in mud directly in front of the beast.

The hippo stopped and uttered a startled grunt and then started toward me. He no longer looked clumsy; he fairly glided now, a big spray of muddy water shooting street-cleaner fashion out in front of him.

He was almost on top of me before I had finished settling in the slime!

Then I pulled the trigger, aiming at his head. That moment, as the bolt thudded in, I shall never forget, for it was only a dull thud; the cartridge was wet and wouldn't fire. There was no time for another. I saw a cluster of wide-eyed faces looking down on me, I saw a grey morning sky and mist on rain-slick leaves, I saw a wasp light on a glistening twig, and I wiggled, but did not move. A black, steam-rollerish mass pounded squarely over me. And then there was a muddy, bloody taste in my mouth.

When next I opened my eyes the sun was out. I had a feeling my eyes were out, too! My head ached, my arms ached, blood kept trickling out of my nose and mouth, and my back felt as though someone had stuck a red-hot wire down the length of my spinal column. I was miserably uncomfortable. And then my head cleared and I did a most exasperating thing: I started to laugh, and then I couldn't stop. The picture of a boy demonstrating the art of making an impression kept flashing into my mind.

I gradually became aware of the dark circle of frowning faces above me as I laughed helplessly. I tried to tell them how funny it was, but no answering grins appeared on those worried faces; instead there was a vague and terrified question in the eyes of the witch doctor, the chief, the hunters, and their followers.

At first I didn't understand it. They glanced at one another a moment, then quickly glanced back at me. The witch doctor backed away slowly; the chief in cautious steps retreated with him. Their eyes were wide; the jaw of one of the hunters dropped, while another's hand trembled as he clutched his fetish bracelet.

"The white man is mad!" I heard the witch doctor whisper.

"He has a crazy lizard in his head," the chief shouted. "Did you see what he did . . . and what he

does now! My God, the man is wild! Only a madman would jump in front of a hippo and then laugh about it!"

"He is wild! He is crazy! Run! He will cast an evil spell on us!" The others yelled as one, and then they dashed pell-mell from the knoll down into the slippery muck and out of sight in the damp, dripping cane of the river flats.

I kept on laughing helplessly, and then all at once I couldn't laugh any more. Everything turned very dark, and I felt Vahnee's hand on my forehead. Then he shook me.

"Don't die, Massah, please! Ah, Massah, don't—please don't!" I heard him murmur as though from a mountaintop a million miles away.

"It is all right, Massah. It is all right now," he said a little while later, and I looked up and saw all our boys standing looking down at us.

I bit my lip. And then I bit it again, hard. But it didn't do much good. I was crying. And it didn't really matter with Vahnee.

When we got into Goo-Mah there wasn't a soul in the town. I dressed a few scratches and tried to limber up. I wasn't badly hurt. The hippo's shoulder had struck me as he passed by in his frantic rush to get away from us, and he had rolled me in the mud. That was all. But I was bruised and scratched and stiff all over. It hurt to stand straight, so I got a cane and stayed bent over. Nothing really was wrong; I felt just as though I had wrestled a big, tough man for an afternoon. The people would not come back. We saw some of them, but they ran shrieking when we walked toward them. We waited round until four o'clock and then started off. That night we slept in the bush, and the next noon got into M'balomah. A day was spent among our still frigid friends, and then we started on back toward Wie-Isse to meet Seahfah with the ivory.

Three very slow days brought us to Wie-Isse. But to my surprise we found that no one in the town or

villages about had seen or heard of Seahfah in six months. Three days more, three days of trying to convince myself that Vahnee's guess was wrong, brought us to Boporo, and it was there that the real surprise came. Instead of a friendly chief I found a sullen and angry one. Sowkah greeted me with a barrage of ill-tempered and ill-timed questions. Why hadn't I sent him the gifts I promised? Was I like most of my white brothers who never kept their word? Did I not know that when I sent for something that had been kept for me by a strong chief it was customary to send a *dash* to that chief to show my thanks? I had better leave his town. I was not welcome there. I was like the white men of the old days who said fine words and took things from the country, giving nothing in return.

And then I said my part, and we stared at each other, each not believing the other's words. But he finally convinced me that none of my gifts had come to him. Seahfah had appeared in Boporo only five days before. He had taken the ivory, saying that another man would follow the next day with the *dashes*. He had tried to sell the gun and, finding no buyer, had headed back toward the Guinea border saying that I was there at the time, and had asked him to sell it for me.

There were no "I told you so's" from Vahnee. He said nothing at all, but sent men out to look for Seahfah. They did not find him, but they learned that the ivory had been sold to a half-caste Arab trader who had smuggled the tusks into French country. Seahfah had sold them to him for a twentieth of their commercial worth and then had completely disappeared.

Because the chief had been justly angry with me and because I knew that he and his people would continue to have a negative feeling for me or any other of my "brothers" who might follow, I decided the only fair thing to do was to try to give him a reason for feeling otherwise toward the pale, unhealthy-looking race. I was not exactly in a position or shape to shoulder the

white man's burden, but I had a stab at it nevertheless. With my luck running the way it was, I should have just gone home, for my all-too-well-meant attempt at righting things only put us in still lower strata.

The chief, when I made it known that I was willing to try to make things right, was most unoriginal in the favours he asked: he wanted an elephant killed and he wanted all his sick people made well, the most important of these being his uncle, a chief in a town several days away. There was no point in just sitting around waiting for the uncle to arrive, so, after we had done what we could for the sick in the village, I asked the chief for a hunter to take me into the bush in search of elephant. He gave me his Number One man and added an honour by insisting upon my taking his favourite nephew to carry the load.

A fresh track was struck several miles from the town, and we followed it for two days through extremely difficult bush. It was a true test; thanks to the chief's nephew I stood up under it well. He enjoyed the forest in the same way that I did, and even when the tracks were hopelessly lost on the evening of the second day he found no reason to frown. I did, but because he thought it a grand joke I tried to take it lightly, too. We had to turn back, though, as our supply of food was exhausted. We hoped to find other tracks on the way home.

Half a day from the town, when hope for an elephant that trip had just about gone, we came upon a herd fording a deep river. They were out of sight on the far bank when we reached the water, but had not been alarmed, so we hurried to get over and pick up their trail. Several hundred yards below the place where they had crossed, the river dropped off into a steep fall and rocky, foaming rapids. The hunter and I made for it on the run and, with more luck than skill, got across the slippery ledges with no mishap. We had reached the far bank and were just about to start into the forest when we heard a terrified cry be-

hind us. As we turned, we saw the chief's nephew, box on head, slip from the ledge and topple into the churning water below. He struck a rock, clung desperately to it a moment, then disappeared beneath the foaming surface. A moment later he came up, only to be dashed cruelly against another rock before he disappeared again. The hunter and I stood paralysed; we could not move or believe. Then he ran down the bank toward a bend and I dived out into the current.

The hours that followed were horrible, a futile fight against the merciless river. It was a helpless, blind struggle for a life that a moment before had been vital and strong and brave. A faint hope would glow—perhaps beyond the next bend? Surely he would come up. . . . And around the bend and nothing there but the relentless pounding of the surging water on the rocks. Finally there was hope no longer, nothing but an aching weariness.

The next afternoon in Boporo we were met by the chief and his sick uncle and all the men and women in the town. I was tired and weak and almost too numb and sick inside to speak. The uncle had been told that I could cure him easily, and when we passed by the first huts he rushed up to me wringing my hands and begging that I make him well at once. One of his own hands was swollen to four times its normal size and literally oozed with pus. The back of my right hand had been gouged on a sharp rock in the river, and the sore had begun to fester. As he clutched me I saw that the blood and pus from his open ulcers were running into mine. I was terrified, but knew if I jerked my hand away he would take it as an insult. Germs meant nothing to him, and he had taken my hand; he was honouring me. It was an awful moment. I edged toward my hut, and Vahnee, grasping the situation, dashed in to get our medical supplies out. I edged nearer. And he still clutched my hand. The chief walked up and stood behind me.

"Can you make him well?" he asked sullenly. "He

is my uncle—a powerful man in this country. He has an evil spirit in his body.”

It was then that I really looked at the diseased man. Automatically my mind had said “yaws,” and I was frightened enough at that. But as I looked carefully I saw something that made me faint and nauseated. On the man’s forehead and on his face and arms were round, silvery scales; there were knots on his eyebrows and head. I looked at his feet. The toes were twisted and receding. All the signs were there! The man who held my hand and whose blood was in my cut had leprosy.

I jerked away. I don’t know what I said, but I ran into the hut. Vahnee had made a strong solution of potassium permanganate, and, making it stronger, I washed my hand in it. Then, still too frightened to do more than mumble, I had him lift the skin about the tiny sore with forceps while I snipped it away with scissors and sucked out as much blood as would come. I finished by putting crystals of straight permanganate into the little opening.

All this had been done without a sound but my mumbling; it had taken a good three minutes. I had completely forgotten the others, and in the relief of having it done with and cleansed, I looked up at Vahnee with a deep breath and a sigh.

“I’m glad that’s done!” I said. “Did you see what that poor devil had? Leprosy! Filthy dirty leprosy!”

Vahnee’s jaw dropped. Then I saw that he was not looking at me; but over my shoulder. I turned slowly. The chief stood against the wall. His eyes were half-closed in anger and his whole body trembled. He hissed his words through jaws that seemed locked and grown together.

“First you cheat me and do not keep your promise,” he began slowly, almost painfully, and then suddenly began to wave his arms and shout. “Then you kill my nephew and now you curse my uncle! He is not good enough to touch your hand. . . . He is a *dirty* man! A devil!”

He went on, but I did not hear him. I felt painfully tired. I was ready to go back home for ever.

I was licked and I knew it, and admitting defeat I ordered the boys to start for the coast. I knew that I had made an utter botch of the trip. My stubbornness and refusal to turn back had caused things to happen that nothing I could ever do would change. Twigs had snapped and broken on the trail. I could never mend them. There was nothing to do but go back. Be we hadn't walked half a day when I decided to swing off to the north into a new country I had not passed through before. Just one more try—always one more—perhaps this would be the lucky one.

The bush we went into was not a friendly one. Its people had plenty, and their harvests were in. And the stories about me had preceded us. When we asked for hunters there were none, and when we asked what we could do they only stared with ill-hid smiles beneath their faces. Though their rice pots were filled, at sunset they had no food for us. There was great famine, they said, but their bellies bulged and they danced and chanted to moon gods. There were room for others and food for others and drums and dancing at night, there were warm skies and clear-cut stars and rivers than ran smoothly, but they were not ours. But then, when I had about given up, our luck changed.

We were near a town called Jay-Mahnah. It was on the border of the great Kongbah forest, and though my desire to pass through its haunted depths on that trip had been quelled far back along the trail, I still wanted to see the town. We were trekking along slowly when behind us the tapping of *fangha* drums sounded, and the chief of a village in which we had been coldly greeted the night before came up in his hammock followed by a large and gaudy retinue. The fact that he was in a hammock and I on foot pleased and gave him uncommon confidence; because I was tired and disappointed it rubbed me the wrong way. I had asked this same chief for men, and he had said he had none even for himself. There were at least

twenty men running along with him now who carried no loads and whose job was to do nothing but sing to him. This was a pointed punch at me, and when I accused him of it we had a heated argument.

After much wrangling which wasn't worthy of either of us the argument dwindled down to which possessed the most magic power. He said he did, and that any time he clapped his hands, no matter where he was, one of his people would come to his side. As we walked toward the town, he told of many other things that he could do, but always came back to his mainstay, the business of clapping his hands—no other man in the world could do this, least of all a white man.

Then we neared the town, and I saw something glittering off in the undergrowth beside the trail; it made my heart jump and gave me a sudden burst of inspiration. It was an empty tobacco can. It was not rusty, and the paper in it looked freshly wrinkled. The chances of its being tossed aside by some native who had just come up from the coast were very small. The chances of its being the Liberian District Commissioner's were smaller; he was not due for three months. So I took a chance.

I manœuvred the chief back quickly on to his favourite subject of personal magic—the business of hand-clapping—and let him push it to the limit. Then as we walked into the town, I sneered at him with the sort of sneer that only weeks of failure can develop, and clapped my hands, calling loudly, "White man! White man!" And before staring eyes—and none wider than mine, for it had been such a wild chance—a white man strolled out of a hut to greet us.

The chief looked at me for only one perplexed moment. His jaw dropped, his eyes popped half out of his head, and his hair seemed to lose its kinks. Then he turned and with an unearthly howl made the fastest run I have ever seen into the bush. His retinue followed him with only one less degree of speed. I tried to be nonchalant. Our boys, even Vahnee, looked at me as though I were a devil. The white man

came up and we shook hands; we walked back toward his hut for a sun-downer. It was only when we got there that I began to hear. I was about as dumbstruck as the others.

The coincidence of meeting a white man back in that part of the bush, when a white man was the one thing in the world that could save my very soiled face, was almost too much to grasp. But two days later when I said good-bye to him a thing happened that made the first coincidence seem almost commonplace. Van Doormink was the man's name; a great giant of a Hollander, and a noted geologist, who had come down through the interior on a survey. His work had taken him into almost all the strange and little-known spots of the earth, and the two days I stayed with him were spent in listening to the fascinating stories of his travels. We had a few common acquaintances, and both of us a great and deep respect for Carl Akeley and the remarkable work he had done in his lifetime. Van Doormink had been going down Mt. Mikeno and had passed Akeley trekking up on the trip on which he was later to die.

When we met I had said "Allen" and he "Van Doormink." That was the only time we had mentioned our names until we left. Then, as I went over to his tent to say a rather reluctant good-bye before starting down to the coast, a very strange thing happened. There were some letters lying on his table, and just to pass time and delay the parting I, seeing that his first initial was "H," asked if his name were "Hans." He answered that it wasn't, and as he did I noticed that the letter I had been looking at had a United States stamp on it; then that it was postmarked "Cincinnati"!

"Do you know someone in Cincinnati?" I asked rather excitedly.

"My sister lives there—in a suburb, Hyde Park," he answered.

"Hyde Park!" I shouted.

Suddenly he picked up the letter, and looked at me with an excited smile on his face.

"What is your name?" he asked slowly.

"Allen—Hans van Nes Allen."

"Yes, that's it! How strange that I didn't think to ask you before."

He handed me his sister's letter and began to laugh. I took it, rather perplexed, and read down the page. Then I began to laugh, too.

"A very dear friend in Cincinnati who used to live in Glendale . . . a friend of hers has a son now in Liberia . . . travelling in the interior . . . interesting if you should meet him . . . Hans van Nes Allen . . . wondering if you were in the same part . . ."

We shook hands solemnly across the table.

Things continued to go wrong on the trip down, but by this time they seemed inevitable and, besides, the meeting with Van Doormink overshadowed little things. When we got into our canoes at Kobolya days later and my last tin of cigarettes and all our matches fell into the water, I don't believe I even swore. I rescued three and carefully put them on a box to dry. After hours in the hot sun, they were ready to smoke, and we pulled into a little river village to get a coal. When the canoe tipped over, I was not surprised. And when we arrived at Cape Mount that evening and I learned that the gold cuff links my house-boy had given me to send my father some months before had been made from a gold wrist watch which he had stolen from me, it seemed quite natural. And it didn't seem to matter any more, for we were home.

Chapter XV

ON the way back to Cape Mount we had stopped at Kobolya and told Baimah Kahtumu the story of Seahfah's treachery and theft, for theft is a serious matter in the bush, where there can be no sure protection against it save personal honour, and it is the duty of every man to give a thief due publicity.

The chief's eyes were sad as he listened.

"I am ashamed for my brother," he said, and immediately, according to the tradition of his station, he took the entire blame for Seahfah's dereliction upon his own shoulders.

He called the wise men together and they held long and weighty counsel, as a result of which it was decided that they must put a curse upon Seahfah which would "lock his feet to the ground" so that he could not escape with the magic *Kamah* gun.

All night fires burned in Kobolya; all night drums rolled and weird incantations were sung. A chicken and a goat were killed, their legs broken, and their blood sprinkled in the fire, weaving the curse which would make Seahfah helpless.

A week after I had returned to the mission my gun was brought to me by a mission native named Pine, to whom Seahfah had given it. Pine told me that, a week after the curse had been made in Kobolya, Seahfah had found an ulcer on his leg which had

begun to spread rapidly. Knowing that this had come to him as a result of the curse, he had sent the gun back, hoping to be cured.

But five days later Seahfah appeared himself, his leg a festering mass of ulcers, and threw himself at my feet, trembling and gibbering like an idiot, and begging me to remove the curse. There was only one thing I could do if I wanted to save face with my boys and Baimah Kahtumu, and uphold the custom of the bush, and I did it. I took a whip and gave Seahfah thirty hard lashes across his bare back. Then I turned him over to Dr. Junge, who cured his ulcers.

As soon as Seahfah was discharged from the hospital he disappeared into the bush, and I never saw him again.

Then Vahnee and the boys and I started back once more, headed for Kongbah. Vahnee and his boys, of course, would take me through any swamp, but we would need more than eight boys for this trip. There was much gear to take back, especially medical equipment, for it looked as though once we did cross the Kongbah forest our worries would only just begin. That was where the medicine was to come in. A hunter brought word that there were lots of sick people in Zuwi, the first town we would come to on the other side of the bush, the head town of Joenie Saybu, paramount chief and ruler of all the upper Gola country. The medicine would help the people, the hunter admitted, but Joenie Saybu didn't like white men and would have nothing to do with them or their ways. Then he gave in rapid succession a dozen or more reasons why I shouldn't, wouldn't and couldn't get through Kongbah and into that world beyond it.

Regardless, however, of his advice, we were packed up the next morning; "we" consisted of eight willing boys, Vahnee and I. But there were thirty "necessary" loads. I cut it down to twenty-five; that was as low as I could get it.

"Fifteen boys to go through the big forest?"

I tried in Binda-Jah . . . there wasn't one. A hundred to go any place else, but toward Kongbah—well, that was different. I sent runners to Zimi, Mombo, Tieyennie—even over to Mahkah. . . . "Sorry, our men are all busy on their farms. . . ."

"Fifteen boys to go through a big forest!"

Another set of runners went out; a letter to the chief with them—"I will pay men three shillings a day"—three times the regular price. . . .

"Sorry, any other time but now—Any other place—The men are all working their farms."

The loads had been packed a week. The second "sorry" answer came back and I was angry. "Is this the way the chiefs show their thanks?" I asked Vahnee.

"But, Massah, this is different," he answered. "It is not fair to use this as a judge."

A week later Vahnee and I sat in Dahndai's palaver house. There were many people around; they were all watching my old friend Walahdu, the witch doctor, who stood before me in the centre of the circle.

"But you have not the *power*," he was saying, "to take men through the haunted forest. You have not the secret medicine that I have!"

It was the fiftieth time he had said it. I was almost ready to believe that he was right.

We had come to see the great Dahndai and ask him to give us men. The old man was willing, but the witch doctor was not. The whole thing had turned into a case of who could out-talk or out-bluff the other. If I won I got the men. If I did not I lost face.

I decided to try to reason the whole thing through with them once more. I stood up. The witch doctor with his magic charm-bags stood across from me. He was grinning and rattling his bone fetishes as I started to talk. I tried to be calm.

"You will admit that I have shot meat for the King's people," I said.

He nodded.

"And you would not—or *could not*—do it yourself.

The people needed food and you cast a charm, but it brought none. I had to get it for them."

He didn't answer; he had stopped rattling his medicine bones.

"All right then, I've shot food, I've helped cure your sick—also when you could not—and I've helped your King when you didn't. Is that true?"

"Uh," the old fellow grunted, and I thought by his look I had won.

"Well, why do you say I have not the power to cross the forest?"

The man's face was set. There was silence all around us. Dahndai leaned forward and nodded his head slowly.

"But wait!" shouted the witch doctor. "You may have the power, but you can't transfer it to your boys."

"Can you?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By magic."

"Let me see some."

The old devil grinned an unhealthy grin and reached into the blood-smeared bag which hung around his neck. This seemed to be what he had been waiting for. He pulled out a large knife and, while all the people watched with mouths open, he plunged the knife through the palm of his left hand.

The point stuck out at least three inches and blood flowed down the hilt. The witch doctor did not change his expression in the least. He took a step toward me. He smiled calmly.

"There is my magic, white man. Can you do that?"

I forced a weak laugh. The dripping blood made me sick. It was all I could do to look at the dirty knife still sticking from his hand.

"And you call that magic!" I said scornfully. "It's a fine trick, to be sure, but tha's not transferring your magic. Let me see you stick the knife through the hands of one of your men."

Mandingo,
daughter of a
paramount chief



A native
beauty

While old Walahdu sputtered away and shuffled his feet in agonized thought, I was unhooking a knife which I always carried on a chain around my neck. My father had sent it to me as a joke. It was a fancy affair with a retractable blade that slid in if a little button was pressed. I had fooled the boys with it often; now Walahdu was about to be impressed with the white man's magic.

"Come, come," I blustered impatiently. "Is that all you can do? Well then, watch me." And pushing the blade of the knife down quickly I jabbed it against my head. A fraction of an inch of skin was cut and then a stream of blood trickled along my cheek. I pulled the knife away, releasing the blade slowly.

Walahdu was speechless with wonder as well as anger, and when I said, grandly, "And now watch me transfer *my* power," and jabbed Vahnee first in the chest and then in the ear, the witch doctor knew that the day was lost. He slunk out of the hut while his former followers yelled in derision and King Dahndai decided I was to have the twenty men.

So again we were ready to start. A rush trip from Zimi brought us, with the twenty new boys, down to Mombo in two days, and after another day of rest we were off.

The first week out was lovely. The birds sang, the trails were cool and sheltered, and the nights beautiful and mysterious. It was definitely a new country we were passing into; even the air was different—it seemed to have a strange smell. And with each day the mountains came nearer and nearer, more out of the purplish mist which for months and months they had slept in. It was not just a distant line of vague, cloudy mountains; it was not just a wall that was far off; it was a new Kongbah. A Kongbah of a hundred rolling peaks which were no longer a mass, but each different, each rising up a world in itself.

Then suddenly one night there was trouble. Vahnee and Flumo and I, together with half a dozen of the new boys, had gone out into the bush behind a little

village where we were staying to get food for the evening chop. We couldn't find any deer, so we looked for monkeys instead. Finally, just at dusk, we came on a large band of red ones and I started to shoot. We wanted two and with the first shots two fell from a tree. They landed with a loud thump and the boys ran over to get them. They came back a moment later to say there was none there. I knew they had fallen and that they must have pulled themselves under bushes, so I went over to look. They were nowhere to be seen. Three more shots brought another pair out of the vines, and again the same thing happened. It was ridiculous, but we just couldn't find them. I tried again, this time picking out a big fellow. He was sitting in the crotch of a tree and I had four shots in him before he could take a jump. He was hit badly and hung by one arm from a thick vine. I walked directly under the spot and fired full at him. The boys were all around me and he fell right in our midst, lay still and looked very dead. As one of the boys reached down to pick him up the monkey came to life and, growling, bit his hand. Then he was off like a flash.

That night the boys had no meat and the next morning the twenty new ones had come to the conclusion that the strange actions of the monkeys had some deep and ominous meaning. It was a sign, they said, that we should turn back. The spirits were against their going into the great forest. All that day they muttered about it, and by nightfall they said they would go no further.

Fortunately we had come to a very large Gola town where we could buy dried meat and chickens and where we were given comfortable big huts to stay in. It had been raining for the past two days and that always dampens trek spirits. Also, the rain brings on malaria, which to a native is a "bad bush spirit." When Vahnee went to round up the loads the next morning all the new boys, and even the old faithful Zo and Yehgeh, had "witches" in their bodies and decided they didn't want to go on.

We were well into the first rolling hills of lower Gola and only a day from Jenne Mahnah, our jumping-off town, so I was in no mood for turning back. I was tactless about telling them so, with the result that not only were they filled with bad spirits, but they found their feet had also become sore. It was the same old story and one that only a change in direction would cure.

As we argued Vahnee came up to tell me that a neighbouring chief was very sick in the next village and wanted me to wait and see him before we started on. It was a good excuse to save face by deciding to stay myself, so I sent word—in a loud voice—that of course I would wait to see him. When, an hour later, the man was carried in on his litter, I wondered if I had chosen the right thing after all.

I think I have never seen such a horrible leg. It was caked with mud and slimy leaves, witch doctor medicine, and dried blood. Finally, after a soaking in warm water, all the cloth came off and I could see the wound.

A cutlass gash, three weeks old and about eight inches long, from the knee to the shin; it had gone deep, but would have been nothing had we come along the day it happened. Now I wondered if we could do anything, for it was a mass of infected ulcers.

"It is not green, Massah; that is good," Vahnee said quietly.

But that was the only good thing about it. The filthy bush preparations had been so packed down into the sores that I could not tell which was decayed flesh and which the witch doctor's dope. In the end I scraped them all out, for one was as bad as the other. And while I did, the old man groaned and Flumo held him and Vahnee kept handing me fresh gauze patches.

When the leg was cleaned it looked as though someone had taken an ice shaver and dragged it along his skin for several minutes, pushing hard when he came

to the middle part. It did look more like real flesh though, and the greyish colouring was gone. I explained—especially to the carriers—that it was there that the witch had lived and, now that we had scraped him away, the man must surely get well. They nodded, not quite convinced, and watched with a little more believing look in their eyes while I caught the far edges of the main cut with silk sutures and pulled them closer together. Then I put a drain into the deepest part, showered the leg with iodine and packed the whole business with boric powder and iodoform, putting vaseline around the edges and bandaging it up with yards of iodoform gauze. The iodine almost finished the chief, but I assured him it was the “strong medicine” which would burn the evil spirit to ashes. He said it had burned his leg to ashes too, but he looked happier nevertheless. After Vahnee had explained to the people that the stitches were a magic fence which would keep all witches from ever coming back into their chief’s body, everyone was pleased and even the carriers smiled and agreed that perhaps I had great power at that. They all wanted me to put several stitches into their bodies too, but I hurriedly worked the knife trick and they were so impressed they quickly forgot to demand more “fences.”

The attendants carried their chief off to his hut, and in the afternoon he called me to his compound and offered thanks formally. He said he felt “mountains” better and backed up his statement by giving me his prettiest daughter as a “thank-you” *dash*. He told me she would make a fine wife and that whenever I looked on her I should remember the goodness that was in his heart for me. I was indeed sad to have to tell him, I said sorrowfully, but I had a terrible trouble—women, even the loveliest, always made my head spin and, since I had to walk a lot, I would have to refuse. The chief was very sympathetic, for he recalled with obvious horror one of his former wives who had caused his head to spin, too. She had, he said, a habit of striking in the face those whom she loved. We now

had something in common and he quite understood my desire to take a bag of oranges and a goat instead. When he found we were going through Kongbah he smiled and shrugged his shoulders, muttering something about it being better anyway to have a woman alive and at home unmarried than dead with a man in the bush.

After telling him innumerable times that the bandages around his sores must not be touched until I returned—no matter how much they itched—we left the town. The carriers were firmly convinced now that I was a man to be trusted, and we were all in good spirits.

The trail to Jenne Mahnah was very rough, through hilly untravelled country; trees were thick on the path and knotted vines and undergrowth seemed to clutch at our legs as though to hold us back. A fine drizzling rain fell constantly and the boys became silent and depressed. Then, too, the receptions we met in the scattered little villages we passed through were disconcerting, for as soon as the natives heard us coming there were wild screams and frantic skelterings into the bush and nothing for us but an empty cluster of wet mud huts, fires still burning and food in the pots, but the village empty and deserted as death. They were afraid of white men.

I thought it might be better if Vahnee and the boys went in first, so we tried it once, but after that never again. They had all gathered around the strangers and were laughing and talking when I walked into their midst. They didn't see me until I was close enough to touch them and then, as though some strange monster had suddenly sprung from hell beneath them, they went wild with horror and fear. An old man standing close beside me fell, too paralysed to move, and lay on the ground, his mouth frothing and his eyes far back in his head. The rest had literally hacked their way through the carriers. I ran along the trail quickly, and the old fellow regained consciousness enough to lurch off jerkily, like a

stunned chicken, into the sheltered gloom of the bush.

Yet that was not enough. We had almost reached Jenne Mahnah, the last town between us and Kongbah, and as the warm sun came out from behind a dark bank of clouds I felt more hopeful. The sun would cheer the carriers and we were close to our goal.

As we started down a steep hill, the jungle opened up before us, and we could see a little valley below, soft green in fresh new rice, sparkling in the mellow light of evening. Beyond, on the rise above it, were the brown tops of many thatched huts. There was Jenne Mahnah, where we could rest and forget spirits for a while, then start through Kongbah. In three days we would be in Zuwi!

I stopped and the carriers came up behind. They were smiling. I breathed a deep sigh of relief. The air was fresh and clean.

"You see, there was nothing to worry about," I said. "We've come to Jenne. In three suns we'll be through Kongbah."

The boys were laughing, but as I turned, smiling, I saw their faces freeze suddenly in terror. Their eyes bulged at something horrible behind my back.

"What's the matter? Why do you——"

One of Dahndai's boys lifted his hand. He pointed beyond me. His whole arm trembled.

"Look . . . look, *Mahsahgie*! Oh, God! I knew it . . . the witch. . . ." His voice trailed off to a feeble gurgle. I jerked around, cold with fear.

Fifty yards down the trail—clear and in the open—stood a large hairy chimpanzee. As I watched, too startled to move, it reared up on its stumpy legs and, grunting, beat its chest.

I knew I must do something at once. Vahnee handed me my gun, but I did not take it. Better, I thought, to frighten it without a gun—that would make an impression. They would think I was not afraid.

I took a dozen steps forward. The chimp reared

higher. He was very large. The carriers were silent behind me. A dozen more steps. The chimp started to scream, that horrible, unearthly sound like women in pain or men gored by bush cows. . . . A few more steps. The chimp was coming toward me! He was only a stone's throw away!

"Witch! . . . Witch!" I cried. "Go! I'm not afraid!"

Why did I say that? Why use the word at all? He was moving faster. I glanced back. The boys were statues—black, oily statues with white eyes. A museum case. Black statues . . . white eyes . . . green-painted leaves. They were waiting. This meant everything. I must do something! I could smell him now, wild, like sweating men. He was down on all fours . . . very close. Why hadn't I taken my gun?

Then something gave way inside me. I turned. I was running back. I was screaming, too.

I came to my senses when I reached Vahnee, standing alone, where a minute before the boys had been. Now they were gone and the loads lay scattered on the ground. The screaming had stopped and there was a rustling in the bush far behind me. I looked toward it. The chimp crashed off into the bush.

Half an hour later we still stood there together, Vahnee and I. I could not look at him. I was ashamed . . . I had lost. Then his eight boys came shyly back and stood beside us, heads down. They had been afraid also. The others did not come. We never saw them again.

As we stood there in the fast darkening night, the trip through the haunted forest seemed definitely finished before it had actually begun. Our carriers were gone, and with only eight boys to carry twenty-eight boxes it seemed useless to try any longer. But Vahnee and I talked it over and it was decided that if we cached our extra equipment at some spot near by in the bush (for we were none too certain of our reception in Jenne Mahnah), perhaps it could be done. With lighter loads we'd make one more try. So for

two hours, by the light of our palm-oil torches, we worked. The loads were carried to a place half a mile off the trail where they were repacked and the new outfit made into eight heavy loads. Only the things which were absolutely necessary were taken; enough supplies for a week, for my idea was only to cross Kongbah and then turn about and come directly back.

When the eight boxes were in shape we took the others and hid them in a large thorn thicket. Then we entered Jenne Mahnah, hoping no roving bands would find our heap of supplies before we returned.

The chief of that town, as we had imagined, was not pleased to see a white man, but he gave me a hut and huts for the boys, and we bought a good supply of rice—enough to last us through Kongbah. I *dashed* him well, and that was as far as it went.

When we went to sleep that first night the last thing I did was look at my watch. It was ten o'clock and the town was silent and sleeping. We had arrived at nine. Our trek from Tahn had lasted seventeen hours, and the mere thought of it made me ache.

For two days I ached as we came nearer and nearer to our goal, and then came the moment when Vahnee and the boys stopped with one accord, looking at one another strangely. It was damp and it was deathly still; it was as though we had walked from a bright, lived-in room into an old musty dark one with the shutters fastened tight. Vahnee spoke and I was conscious of the exaggerated sound of his voice. It was strained; it sounded like a voice in a nightmare—unnatural and unreal.

"We are in Kongbah," he said quietly.

Why did he have to say it? I thought. Then I looked at the boys. They were watchful and nervous. They were close together and kept shifting their eyes from side to side.

I felt an uncomfortable awareness of sound, or lack of sound, as we walked on deeper into the gloom. I felt that we were being glared at, and yet when I looked

and my eyes swung from side to side as the boys' eyes did, there was no one and nothing but jungle. It had closed in behind us like the door of a room which had been shut and locked. I felt that, if I could turn on the light, things would be normal, but the light was behind and a curve in the trail had closed the door to the sun.

But other than the eerie feeling that some dread thing was about to happen there was nothing extraordinary for the first two days. It was on the night of the second that it came and I still remember it as an experience so awful and unreal that the haunted forest seems rightly named.

The natives' belief in the witch that lives in the great swamp I explained to my own satisfaction at noon on the second day. We arrived at the swamp then and, with much muttering and many shouts of secret words and rubbing of fetishes on the boys' part, entered its slimy windings and trembling patches of quicksand. There was a certain vague and poorly outlined trail to follow, but one step off it meant sinking up to your neck in muck and possibly going out of sight in the soft oozing sand that pulled everything down. The fact that elephants won't attempt to cross it, and go around the swamp, some miles out of their way, to avoid it, should be enough to show sane men they should do the same, but they don't; and this, so far as I can see, is the reason they disappear and are "eaten by the Kongbah witch."

In the first place, natives want to get through the forest in as short a time as possible and try to make the trip in two days. When they do it in three there are seldom deaths, but countless times on the two-day dashes there are men who start out and are never seen again, having made a misstep in the swamp at night. "The witch grows fat," the people whisper, and another scar is added to this demon's arm of revenge.

One of these victims of the witch Vahnee and I saw. Fortunately we were ahead of the boys, for I think they would have thrown down their loads and not stopped

running until they were out of the jungle if they had seen him. I can't say that I would have blamed them either.

The two of us were feeling our way along and trying to find solid footing for the carriers with their added weight of loads, when suddenly my feet slipped from the tuft of swamp grass I had jumped to and I splashed down into the muck. Trying to get back again as quickly as possible I reached out toward a whitish stick lying in the water near me. As I pulled, it came out of the goo and with it the bloated head and shoulders of a native. The "stick" was a bone of an arm that the flies had polished white.

That jerk was all the body needed to free it, for, as we watched, it rose slowly and became the puffy distorted figure of a man. A silver heart-shaped charm was tight about his neck, and in the gloom it glistened dully and seemed to leer as did his face. The other hand was clutching at the chain.

Vahnee cut a palm frond and threw it quickly over the corpse and then went on, leading the boys another way. As I hurried along to catch up with them I could not help looking back once. The picture I saw was grotesque beyond description. A body floating on the blackened water with a silver fetish fast about its neck; a palm frond, the symbol of victory, laid ironically above it all. I thought of the witch and wondered how many countless others the swamp had claimed in his name.

But it was that night that Kongbah showed me its real spirit. Vahnee and six of the boys had gone on fast ahead of us to take word to the Zuwi chief that a white man was coming to see him. He already knew, for we had sent a runner up through Sierra Leone the day we decided to come, but this was country custom and had to be done again. Vahnee would arrive late that night, and by the next noon when I arrived the chief would be prepared and his town in order and waiting. That is always the custom. When important men (and most white men are important in the bush)

visit a big chief or king they must give him warning and days to prepare for the welcome.

Flumo and Yegeh, two good boys who had been on all the trips and had shown countless times their dependability and loyalty, stayed with me. At about four o'clock in the afternoon, after crossing a stream with difficulty, for it was swollen high by the recent rains, we stopped to make camp for the night. I chose a place near the water and the boys a spot a bit farther up where they busied themselves hacking away several large trees for no other reason, I think, than to keep occupied. I was glad they did, for it cleared a patch in the roof of hanging green and for the first time in what seemed weeks we saw a clean sweep of blue sky. After this was done we built two shelter huts, open-sided and thatch-roofed, mine by the stream and theirs on the edge of the clearing. Then we went out to hunt.

Rounding a bend on a well-smoothed elephant-run, we came head-first into a chimpanzee. We looked at each other for a moment and then, at my first move for the gun, he let out a yell and clattered off in a hasty retreat.

"You know where he has gone, don't you, Massah?" Flumo said, and his voice had the same old Kongbah tremor in it.

"He's just gone," I answered. "They don't think when they move that fast."

Neither of the boys smiled and Flumo shook his head slowly.

"He has gone to tell his father," he said. "Tonight the witch will come. We must go on, Massah. It is not safe to stay."

I scoffed at him and said we were staying; it was almost dark and I couldn't see stumbling on in the night. We shot a monkey going back to camp, and the boys ate it—ears, eyes, brains and all. Though their appetites were not bothered, it was plain to see that they were on edge and under a strain. And though I tried to hide it, I was, too.

When an owl swooped down through our flickering circle of half-light I decided it was time to go to bed. I sent the boys to their shelter and then went to mine. I was aching and my neck was stiff from turning. My whole body pulsed and buzzed with the throb of night. I was dreadfully tired but finally I dropped off.

I don't know how long I'd been asleep, when I was suddenly awakened—fairly thrown out of bed—by a terrific, deadening crash. It stunned me for a moment and I jerked the net off the cot and stumbled out of the hut into a tomblike silence; there was not even the sound of the wind in the trees, and, strangest of all, no sound of the stream that I knew was only a few feet away in the darkness. As I stood confused and dazed, something clutched at me. I jumped, and then realized that it was one of the boys. A few seconds later the other came, and they both sat there on the ground holding my legs tightly. I was numb all over though my body was tingling and I slowly became aware of a distant ringing in my ears. There was a strong smell of ozone in the air. Then, as I stood there with the two frightened boys at my feet, the strangest and most horrifying thing I have ever seen happened before our eyes.

The fire was about twenty paces away and, until that moment, the coals had been dull grey with a faint glow of red showing through. Now they became bright red and seemed fairly to dance in the darkness; they began to move toward us! Slowly they came at first, then more quickly and, one jumping after another, they tumbled by and into the stream, where their weird, bright eyes were deadened. We stood alone, terrified in complete darkness.

I knew that the wind was blowing; it must have been coming right at us and blowing hard, but I could neither feel nor hear it, nothing but the tingling numbness in my body. The thatch was flying from the roof; I knew that, too, for lightning had begun to flash and I could see it through the top of the hut. Then suddenly it came with a vengeance—bolt after bolt of

lightning. The uncanny part was that I heard no thunder. I could feel it shake the ground beneath us, but there was no sound—only that ringing in my ears, growing ever louder. I looked down at the boys. Their eyes were turned toward me and Flumo's mouth moved. His face was like a yellow mask with a jaw that worked on a spring. It had no voice, but I knew what he was moaning.

"The witch! Oh, Massah, the witch! He has come—his son has told him where we are!"

I tried to step forward but I seemed completely paralysed. My legs were frozen to the ground.

I knew we must get to the clearing. Trees were falling about us, and one had crashed over the boys' hut. There was nothing left of it—only leaves and split branches that glared white in the blinding light. I tried to move again; I was numb; I lost my balance and fell, the boys clinging to me.

"Let go! Let go!" I cried.

I knew they couldn't hear me. It was shouting in a dream, and my legs were like heavy fence posts that I could not lift.

"Let go! Let go!"

But they only gripped all the tighter. I struck Flumo across the face and my hand felt as though it were asleep. No feeling, but he fell and then Yegeh, too. I was free and I pulled them behind me as I staggered toward the clearing.

We sat huddled together where the fire had been. I was beginning to hear now. The ringing was still there and with it the thunder. A continuous roll of it—far away at first, then it came nearer and surrounded us. Big drops of rain started to fall. They hit the dry ground and puffed up little explosions of dust. It felt fresh and good as it ran down my back. It made me sleepy, and my eyes kept closing and I'd have to wrench them open with an effort. And then I stopped making the effort.

When I opened my eyes it was light and it was morning, and the three of us lay in the mud. The

boys lay quietly watching me, and when I tried to speak I found I could only mumble incoherently, for my mouth was swollen where something had struck against it. I felt painfully tired and cold, but I struggled stiffly to my feet.

The camp was a wreck. Trees had toppled all around us and there were deep holes in the ground as though bombs had hit in a heavy barrage. The stream was far over its banks and the chop box had been washed away, so we had no food. It had the shells for the shotgun in it, too, and there was no way to get any.

We got what was left of the one load together and then sat down by the stream. We sat there for an hour and no one spoke a word. I knew I must say something to the boys, for they sat dully waiting. Their faces were grey and tired; their eyes sank far back in their heads; none of us had energy enough to start out.

"Well, the witch has done his best and we're still alive. Now I suppose you know whose power is greater," I said weakly.

It wasn't much at that moment—but it was something to be alive and presently we started slowly and stiffly up the trail.

I never knew how long it took Flumo and Yegeh and me to make that trip in to Zuwi. We stumbled on wearily for hours and when at last we heard the distant drums we were almost too exhausted to care that we had conquered the witch of Kongbah.

We staggered down to the banks of a river and saw before us on the far bank the town that I had been told I could never reach. The three of us sat down thankfully to wait for Chief Saybu's warriors, who were launching their big canoes for us. It was a beautiful sight as they paddled swiftly across the glistening water. Gawdy feather headdresses bowed and swayed in rhythm, flashing spears and black shining backs reflected the bright sun and the drums on the far shore rolled in accompaniment to the rowers' victory chant.

Vahnee came to meet us and he helped me into one of the boats. In a few minutes we were across the river and marching up the hill to Saybu's palaver house. High up the hill we wound while the forest fell below us like a green, quivering blanket. There was a weird, tense feeling in the air, a sense of silence that the thumping drummers could not hide. The huts were like any bush huts, round and square with their small doors gloomy and mat-hung; the people were shy, but I had seen them shy and running away before. There was something different about this town, something that I had never felt before.

A river ran below Zuwi, circling and cutting it off from the great forest on three sides, and another hill rose behind. It was indeed a lost town as it stood high and alone in the rolling miles of jungle. There was a feeling of strangeness about its location, too, for few towns in the lower country are built on high open hills, but there was more than this—an uncanny feeling of suffocation. It was in the warriors' eyes, and it was in the faces of those who looked or ran as we passed; it was in the very air itself. It was of something impending, of something they feared that was near them. I felt it, and Vahnee, walking beside me, said uneasily, "Something is wrong in this country."

As we came to an open place in the centre of the town the warriors stopped, forming a half-circle behind us. In front, about thirty feet away, was another half-circle of men; and in the centre of them, seated on a carved ivory stool, one hand resting lightly on the fuzzy head of his small favourite son, sat King Saybu, robed in a gorgeous, flowing country gown bright and sparkling with gold. In his other hand was a long silver spear, the point of which stuck in the ground before him. On each side, spreading out to make the semi-circle, were fifteen of his sub-chiefs, speakers, town chiefs, and other important men of the court. They all stood impassively, their faces stern and expressionless, while we seated ourselves across from the chief.

When we were settled the chief spoke to his speaker, without even a glance at me.

"Ask the stranger what bring him to my country."

He spoke in a dialect I understood and, thinking it would make an impression on him and his people, I immediately answered the question in that same dialect, speaking directly to the chief. If my doing so had any pleasing effect on them they did not show it. It was as though I had not spoken. I felt as though I had eaten peas with a knife. The question was passed on, in the orthodox country fashion, from his interpreter to Vahnee and then to me. Not to be downed so easily I answered again in his language.

"I came to your country because I have heard great stories of it, and of you and your people. I have come to see you and stay several suns in your town."

The answer, which he understood perfectly, was relayed back through Vahnee and the interpreter. The chief listened attentively as though the words were new to him, then nodded his head. That was the last question or answer which arrived at its destination in anything even remotely resembling its original shape. From then on it seemed to be a contest between Vahnee and the chief's interpreter to see who could make the best story.

The chief said, quite simply and with not much interest:

"I welcome you, then. I have several small *dashes* for you, and you may stay as long as you wish."

It went through the interpreter and grew beautifully. Vahnee did his bit, and as it was shouted out to me it went something like this:

"The great chief greets you. With bowed head he welcomes you and wants you to know that he has many beautiful *dashes* for you. His town is at your feet and he wants you to stay and enjoy it for moons and moons to come."

"I am pleased to hear that," I said, "and hope you will let me do something for you in return. I have medicine, and I see about me some people whom I



The "high devil" squats, and still does not lose his balance

think I can help. I, also, have some *dashes* and, though they are very small, I hope that you will find pleasure in them."

When it reached the chief I had said I would cure all the sick in the town, perform countless miracles of magic and had brought him hundreds of handsome and useful *dashes*!

But it was not until several speeches later that the flint really flashed on the steel. Saybu had seemed rather bored with my presence up to that time. Then, to a question of his as to whether I was a good hunter, Vahnee answered that I was the greatest in the country and had killed "hundreds and hundreds of elephants, bush cow and hippopotami." At the stupendous statement the chief, without waiting for his interpreter to make it bigger, leaned forward tensely and spoke directly to me.

"So you are a great hunter," he said.

"Well, a fair hunter," I temporized.

The chief stood up and took several steps toward me. His face was set in an attempt at calmness, but I could see that he was excited. The men behind him pressed forward; they were tense and had anxious looks, too.

"And you have killed elephants?" he went on.

"I have killed several, yes."

"Do you fear them?"

"No, I don't think I do. Why do you ask?"

He was standing right in front of me. I stood and he held out his hand. I took it and we snapped fingers long and lustily. A different look was in his face and he smiled when he spoke again.

"That is very good," he said. "That is *very* good."

He turned suddenly and strode back to his stool. His next words were to his interpreter and he said them as though the little interlude had never come.

"King Saybu says he now wishes to give you your *dashes*," Vahnee told me, and as he spoke the chief clapped his hands twice above his head.

From behind him on the left side of the curving line

of his retinue two young men walked out leading a cow and three goats. A moment later several more came with bowls of uncooked rice, eggs, and a few bananas. It was a splendid gift and a big one, for the hungriest part of the "hungry time" had come, and I knew they were feeling it in the country.

I was rather bothered though, for I saw no chicken in the *dash* and that, as usual, was the only way to know how they really felt toward me. A period of scurrying about followed, and finally a man came up to the chief holding a night-black rooster. A black rooster! My heart jumped into my mouth and I took a quick look at Vahnee. His eyes were squinted as though he didn't know what to make of it and he looked worried. The man handed the rooster to the chief and hurried away. The chief held the flapping black bird silently and frowned at Vahnee and me. The rest of the gathering frowned too. It was a tense moment.

And then the man who had brought the rooster ran up with a wooden bowl, which he placed on the ground before his master. They both put their hands into it while another man held the rooster. In a minute they had smeared him and now, instead of black, he was a sad, dejected and wet grey. He croaked feebly and the chief walked over to us with him in his arms.

"I am sorry," he said with an embarrassed smile, "that we have no white chickens in my town. You must take this one though"—he handed me the clayish mass; "and when you have kept it in the sun for a while you will see how white and pure my heart is for you."

I gave a deep sigh of relief. Vahnee did the same, and all during the time that the chief was giving us the other *dashes* we kept looking thankfully at the half-drowned rooster.

The gifts were given in a most unusual and beautiful way. The chief walked over to the cow and goats and bowls of food and, rolling his gown back off his arms, lifted his hand above his head shouting:

"O God! God of the traveller and harvest, come into this small *dash* of ours that I may give it to this stranger from my heart."

With that he bowed over the animals one at a time and over the bowls of food, saying at each one: "I give this with my heart . . . I give this with a white and friendly heart. . . ."

When it was brought to me I lifted my hands above my head as Vahnee had taught me, and then bowed down over each thing saying: "My heart accepts this . . . my heart accepts this brother's *dash* in friendship . . . *um fah sah kumbah* . . . my heart lies down."

After the chiefs left us we had several hours to ourselves, and we tried to figure out what was wrong in the town and what made the people so queer. The chief had surely been under some strain other than the burden of near-famine. That came almost every year and they were used to it. He acted frightened, plain scared, and so did all his people.

That night just after dark there was a knock at the door, and when Vahnee pulled aside the mat, there stood the chief, with all his retinue, waiting outside in silence. They were still robed in their beautiful country gowns and as they filed in there was no sound but the swish of heavy cloth upon the rough floor. They looked and sounded like a group of monks walking into a dimly-lit chapel at night. When they all were lined round the wall Saybu took a step out from the rest and, facing me, said in a tired voice: "*Kassai bele kambah Mahni* (There is no rust on God), but I have come to tell you of death, *Mahsahgie*."

I bowed solemnly, for I had no idea what to say to such an ominous pronouncement. He sighed deeply, and when he spoke it was as though it were in his sleep, for never once did his stony expression or the monotonous tone of his voice change.

"Many, many wars and rice seasons ago," he began, "there lived a chief in our land who was great among all the chiefs of the forest. He was Kahmo Gbwitu,

first strong ruler of the upper Gola country. He was the father of us all, and it was he who made us powerful and rich in slaves. All during the seasons that he lived there was food, and as each harvest followed the last there was joy and plenty.

"Then he grew old and died, as even the great men must, and when our fathers buried him there were suns of funeral feasting and dancing. When the ceremony was over and the time had come to choose a new king, our fathers picked Zahnah Gbwitu, oldest son of Kahmo, and the bravest warrior and hunter in all the land. On the night that he took his father's sword as the symbol of kingship and power, he spoke to our people, as is the custom, and asked them what they most wished him to do for them during the time that he ruled. The people asked but one thing of him—that he lead them and bring prosperity as his father had before him—and when he had promised he would do this he spoke his wish to them.

"'All that I ask of you,' spoke Zahnah Gbwitu on the hill that rises above this village now, 'is that when I die, if I have lived and ruled as you ask of me, you bury me as you buried my father with suns of feasting and dancing. It is my wish that in the Spirit World he may look on me with smiles and know that I have lived as he.'

"Our people promised—it was a small demand to make—and so the seasons passed. Zahnah ruled and joy was in the land. We knew no famine or defeat, and when he was an old man our country was richer by far than when his father left it.

"And then the sun came that Zahnah died. And on the evening of his death a strange people marched into our country, from the great salt water beyond our forest. And though Zahnah had kept his promise to us, the strange people would not let us keep our word to him.

"We were not able to do what he had asked, and we knew great trouble would come to us for not keeping our promise to him."

The chief shook his head sadly and his voice faltered.

"Many seasons came and left us, and all was well in our forest until one morning when one of our people went to his rice farm and found all of his huts pushed over, his rice trampled down and tracks of an elephant everywhere in the field. We thought little of it at first, for that has often happened in our farms, but the next morning, when we found the same elephant had come back to eat more rice, we began to wonder.

"A hunter was sent out to shoot the beast, and he did not return on the first night nor yet in three suns. Then men were sent to look for him, and they had gone only a short distance from the ruined rice farm when they found him—dead, his body trampled into the ground—and his gun, the spear still in it, lying broken at his side. That night I called my chiefs together, and though we all feared the meaning of a hunter killed with the spear still in his gun, we agreed that another hunter must be sent out.

"Three days passed and he did not return. On the fourth morning men found fresh elephant tracks and the hunter's body torn and trampled into the ground not far from where the first man had been killed."

Saybu paused and rubbed his brown forehead. The lamp on the table flickered and Vahnee poured more oil into it. Outside it was black and the forest hummed with night; the line of chiefs seemed carved into the wall, dusky statues robed in flowing colour. The chief's voice droned on.

"Then again the old men of the town met with me, and we did not dare say the words that were in our hearts. Though all of us felt that these deaths had come as a warning from our dead king, none of us uttered our thoughts. It was a fear so great we found no strength to speak it. All the hunters in the forest were called to Zuwi, and for three suns we danced the medicine dance to please the angry spirit and then they laid their spears and guns upon his grave to show that they were his slaves and still respected him. Offerings of meat and tobacco and gunpowder were

put there, too, but he would not touch them, so we knew he was not satisfied.

"A young boy of a village near ours came to see me then and said that he would go into the bush and not return until either he or the elephant was dead. The boy was Zola Gbwitu, great-grandson of our unhappy spirit. His father was Momo, king of the bushmen and hunters.

"The boy went and was gone five suns. Then we saw fresh tracks again and found another rice farm destroyed, so we knew that he, too, must have been killed. We found him near the others on the sixth evening. His body was trampled to blood and his head was torn away and thrown far off in a thicket. He had fired his gun and there was a blood trail leading away, but it soon stopped, and we knew the elephant was not hurt.

"It was only then that we spoke our real fear. The elephant was the spirit of Zahnah come back to torment us because we had not kept our promise to him. It was more than a rogue from the herd." His voice was only a murmur: "*It was a witch elephant.*"

Saybu clutched the silver spear in his hands. They trembled and the shadow that it made on the wall was shifting and ghostly. His eyes were wide, and the lamp sputtered feebly on the table. Mist from the mountains was sinking down over the town, and I felt it cold on my forehead. Saybu's voice whispered on, and the circle of chiefs remained silent, unmoving statues.

"And no one dared go into the forest then. They knew that only death was waiting for them. We made many sacrifices on the grave, cows and goats and chickens were offered, but the witch kept coming back into our farms, and we knew that soon our next season's harvest would be ruined. The witch doctors held a secret meeting and said that before any man could go into the bush a virgin girl must be offered upon the grave. Then, and only then, they said, would the spirit of Zahnah be satisfied. When this

was done, they promised, the witch elephant would leave our forest and farms.

"The girl was ready, but on the night before she was to go a strange thing happened."

The chief leaned toward me. His face was but a foot away and his eyes looked deeply into mine.

"On that night, in my sleep a vision came. In it I saw a strange hunter. He was from another land and he had a magic gun. I dreamed that he would come into our town. . . ."

Saybu stepped quietly away from me and joined his men, who stood motionless against the wall. They were so still they might have been a sculptured fresco around the room. Their eyes all watched me questioningly; what would I say, what would I do?

The next move was up to me; clearly something must be said, but I didn't know what I wanted to say. Of course, I told myself quickly, I didn't believe in witch elephants, but still . . .

The pause was getting awkward, so I began slowly, "It is very strange that you have come to tell me this story, King Saybu. . . ." Then I stopped and wondered how on earth to continue. I wanted to help these people, I didn't believe in witches, and yet . . .

I glanced at Vahnee, and he grinned broadly as he said softly, "We can start in the morning, Massah."

So he had it all decided. Very well then, if Vahnee could face this witch elephant, so could I; and, shrugging helplessly, I turned to Saybu.

"It is strange indeed that you should have had that vision," I began with more warmth than I felt. "For another hunter, too, had one, and that is why he came to your town."

The chief bowed low, and the men behind him muttered something and touched their hands to their foreheads.

"I have come to know you," I went on, trying to exhibit a courage I did not feel, "and I have come here to hunt or do anything else for you that you ask of me. I am quite sure I can kill the witch elephant,

and if you will give me a good hunter I will go out for it in several suns."

The chief bowed low again. "That is brave of you," he said, "but the vision told me you would start with the new sun, and our witch doctors say none of our hunters may go."

"Well, I cannot go unless you give me one of your hunters."

The chief squinted. "You can track an elephant, *Mahsahgie?*"

"Of course I can!" I answered, hoping that he would never come to watch me do it. "But in my country it is a custom that a hunter never go out alone, especially if he is hunting a witch. I must ask that you give me a man—a brave one—or I cannot shoot for you."

Saybu frowned and turned to his attendants. They whispered together, and he looked again at Vahnee and me.

"We have one great hunter who is willing to go into the bush with you," he said. "He is the chief of all forest men, and it is only because the witch doctors held him back that he did not go before. He will come to see you."

The men started out of the hut, but Saybu lingered behind them. As the last one was gone he turned to us and smiled. It was a reassuring, friendly look.

"You are a good man," he said. "I hope we shall not find you dead in the forest, too."

He swept through the door and was gone. The mat swished shut. I glanced ruefully at Vahnee.

"That was a pleasant little thought, wasn't it!"

"He meant it, Massah," Vahnee answered quickly; "it is an honour to have him say it."

"And may I suggest to you that it would be an honour to wring your neck?"

But Vahnee only grinned.

An hour later there was a knock at the door. A man walked into the yellowish light of the room.

He was powerfully and gracefully built, of medium height, and had the well-developed legs of a hunter. A cloth hung from his shoulder; it was heavy and gorgeously woven with strips of beaten gold and silver wire. It glistened dully in the lamp flame.

"I am Momo Gbwitu," he said in a calm, sure voice. "I have come to see you. In the morning, early before the sun is awake, we will start into the forest for the witch elephant."

"I am glad," I said, but I did not feel glad.

"And you have medicine—you have some secret charm to guard you?"

I shook my head.

"No, I have only my gun. It has power."

"I have heard of your gun, but have you no other medicine, some charm that will make you invisible?"

"No, Momo. The gun is enough. You will see."

He frowned.

"Yes, I know the gun is great, *Mahsahie*. I have heard stories of it, but this is no ordinary elephant we hunt. It is a cruel witch, and we will need strong magic besides our guns." He pulled the embroidered cloth above his left arm and pointed to a thin beautifully woven elephant-tail bracelet banded with thin strips of gold. "This is my magic power," he said. "No animal can see me when I have it on. Have you nothing like this?"

"No, but you will see. The gun is very strong."

He frowned again and nodded, pulling the cloth down over his arm. I had seen more than the bracelet, though, on the bare arm; scores of tiny tusk-shaped cuts. They humped up, smooth, black scars in the dull light, going up his arm and out of sight under the cloth. Each, I knew, in the Gola country meant an elephant killed for his people. They were bush decorations of honour. Momo had over three hundred.

He passed through the door quietly, but there was a puzzled look on his face. He seemed worried. I was worried, too, and that night I slept very little.

In the morning, long before the sun was up, I got out of my cot and built a small fire in the centre of the floor. The voice I had heard all through the night still came from the hut across from mine. The voice was Momo's as he chanted into a smoky medicine fire, weaving spells which would help him kill the witch elephant.

But my fire was for a different reason. The bullets might be damp from the rains and I wanted to take no chances. I remembered the hippopotamus and the cartridge that hadn't gone off. My back still ached at the thought of it! I leaned forward and started to roll the bullets carefully in the warm grey ashes. The chant droned on, monotonous and low, from the hut beyond.

I had squatted there half an hour and as I gathered the bullets in my hand I turned, for Momo stood in the open doorway. He had on his hunting jacket and loincloth and his gun was in his hand. He smiled broadly, his whole face was beaming and his teeth showed white like snow on dark oil. He fell at my feet and touched his magic bracelet to my gun.

"Ah, *Mahsahgie*, you do make medicine!" he whispered. "I knew it—all great hunters must—but I worried and I feared all through the darkness." He smiled again. "Ah, it is good, *Mahsahgie*. It is good that you know the secret of great power, too."

I nodded.

"It is good . . . yes," I managed to say. "Yes, it is very good!"

We walked from the hut. Vahnee came with us to the edge of the town. On the hilltop he took my hand a moment and said a word, then he turned back, for the witch doctors had said only two of us could go. The dawn was very still and heavy. Low clouds hung over the huts. In the bush the leaves were wet and cool on my face and legs. In my mouth the dew tasted like cistern water. We walked on an hour,

and then we came to the rice farm. It was as the chief had said, the huts were pushed over and wrecked, and the rough fields were ruined with the new green shoots trampled deep into the ground. It was as though a stampeded herd had gone through the night before, but by the tracks we knew that it was only one.

We headed south into the jungle, following a little path for a mile and then going off into the bush. There were signs of the elephant all about, and I could tell that it was the same one, for a toe on the right front foot was deformed and left a peculiar high place in the impression. The thing which surprised me most was the fact that the elephant did not seem large. I could well see what he was capable of doing, but his front tracks only measured a bit over a foot across. Any rogues that I had heard of were big fellows. I was more surprised still when we came to a place where several weeks before he had wallowed in the mud and then rubbed up against a tree. The bark was scratched away, and the highest point was only a bit over seven feet from the ground! I asked Momo if he was sure it was the same elephant. He nodded, and a moment later we came to an opening in the bush where the scrub and vines were trampled down and brown and withered by the sun. He paused here, pointing to a mucky place in the centre with many tracks about it.

"The first hunter died here," he said in a low voice. "He was Ko, and Ko was my forest friend."

We passed on, and not long afterward came to another place where the ground was marked and the dead shoots dried and curled by the heat. Here again Momo stopped.

"The second hunter died here," he said as though to himself. "He was Jahlah, and it was with me that Jahlah shot his first elephant." He stood silent a moment and then shook his head slowly.

Then on again until we wound around a hill and

into a low grass-filled valley. Here Momo walked more slowly, he seemed not to want to come to the middle of it. Ahead in the green I could see a brown patch, and near by a lonely tree stood looking down as though to guard the barren place. When we came to it the queer-toed tracks were thick upon the ground. Water from the recent rain lay grey and stagnant in them. In the centre of the place Momo fell to his knees, while I watched in silent astonishment. His face was set, but his lip twitched as he gazed at the ground before him. When he spoke it was only a murmur. He seemed alone—alone with his thoughts and his sorrow.

"And here you died—you who were but a boy and a child!"

He took a deep breath and the muscles lumped out on his jaw. His teeth were tight; he seemed to force the words through them. "But, Momolu, I will not forget. He will pay and then you will be happy. He will pay for what he has done!"

He looked back at me. A tear ran down from one eye. The thin line of dampness stood out clearly, a streak of glittering brightness on the brown.

"My son died here," he said simply.

"Then you are the Momo who is king of the bushmen and hunters!" I said. Stupid, but I hadn't realized it before.

He nodded slowly.

"Yes . . . and Momolu would also have been a king," he answered bitterly.

It was by now eight o'clock in the morning and we had left Vahnee at the hilltop only two hours before. We walked on, and soon we came upon rather fresh tracks. Three days old, Momo said they were, and then in a few minutes we found others a day old, and, finally, tracks made that morning. They led us over to a steep hillside and we began to go warily.

The bush grew thicker and darker. We were fairly crawling through it now, and yet we knew we must not make a sound. One snapped twig and the elephant would hear us, for we could hear him moving about in the brush only a few yards away, though we could not see him. His belly rumbled and that familiar sound of slow breathing was close, so we knew he had not heard us. He was feeding. Momo lifted his finger to his mouth and pointed to his ear. Then we started to creep forward again.

I hadn't gone more than a couple of yards when, awkwardly enough, I caught my toe on a snag and crashed down into a thicket. There was a loud squealing trumpet which seemed to come from right over our heads, and then a thundering as the elephant ran off down the hillside. I dashed forward, the gun cocked and ready, and was soon out in the open where he had stood. He was gone, but in the stream below I could hear him splashing as he crossed. I lifted the gun and waited. The branches were moving by the water and there was a cleared spot just at the top of the rise across from me. If he went up there I could see him.

And then, in the space of a minute, I did the two worst things a hunter can do in the bush. The elephant ran into the open patch across from me and I shot. There was no chance to pick a vital spot, so I just shot at him. I heard the bullet hit and, in the excitement of thinking he surely must be down, ran forward without waiting for Momo. Behind me I heard him shouting, and as I crossed the stream and stumbled up the hill I heard him calling frantically.

"*Mahsahgie! Konokeh, Mahsahgie!* Wait for me! The witch . . . wait, wait!"

But I ran on. I could see blood spoor now. The trail was easy to follow, and I thought I would find the elephant dead at any moment as I ran along. I was panting when I reached the top of the hill and started into the bush again, then suddenly stopped, for I

heard something crashing ahead of me, and the next instant an elephant trumpeted.

On the hillside the bush was low and the sun came easily through it to the ground, but on this dark wooded table along the top of the ridge there was no sun at all. The trees were a solid roof of leaves above, and only a dim and ghostly light seeped in through the vines. Running from the brightness of the open into it was like running from a sunlit terrace into a sombre panelled study. Everything was black and then very splotchy and dazzling until my eyes became accustomed to the gloom. As they did, I saw the elephant tumbling toward me, a grey shape that loomed like a rolling boulder. I fired twice, but the shots seemed to roll off his thick grey hide.

The third shot I tried to place carefully. He was not more than a hundred feet away, and I knew that if I missed it there was little chance. I fired—a frontal shot right in the centre of his broad forehead—but he didn't even falter in his charge. Frantically I jerked the fourth cartridge up; it was the last one, for I hadn't waited after the first shot to reload. I pulled too quickly and the soft lead nose caught as it entered the barrel and the gun jammed.

There was nothing to do but run. The gun was useless now and I dropped it. The elephant was only twenty paces away. His trunk lashed wildly out ahead and his ears reached forward like grey flapping flags, ragged and torn by a storm. The ground was shaking under me, and where in heaven's name could I go? And then I saw my tree.

There is a tree that grows in Liberia all through the forest back from the coast. It is big and seems to pull its roots up out of the ground with it. The trunk goes straight up and, unlike the banyan, the limbs do not grow back into the ground, though the appearance is the same. There is a cage of roots which grows about the base of the tree rising up sometimes ten or twelve feet and going out as much as fifteen feet in every direction. Whenever I would see one of them along

the trail I would say to Vahnee, "If ever the elephant turns I'll go under one of these and hide!" It got to be a sort of a joke between us, for his answer would always be, "That is a good idea, Massah, but when the elephant turns will the tree remember to be there?"

The tree had remembered to be there and, like a rat dashing into a hole with a yapping cur close behind him, I dived under it, squealing like one, too, but the elephant swished by and, for the moment at least, I was safe. I crawled back into the centre of the cage; the rough weathered roots were soft like arms that held me. The elephant had dashed on. I heaved a deep sigh and sat quietly.

There was no sound, and I could see the jammed gun lying ten paces away from the outside bars of the tree. I decided to creep out from my place and get it. The elephant had gone on. I could quickly pull the jammed shell out and then load up again. I felt foolish because I'd dropped it.

Slowly I started to slip through the eight feet of curling wood that sheltered me from the open. I was almost out when, from the direction that the elephant had disappeared, there was a crashing and he thundered back. But this time he stopped. He was only a pebble's toss away and his rough grey side was toward me. I saw where the first fool shot had hit, high in the centre of the back. It had gone down into the intestines, and blood dripped in a slow stream from it. What was it that the English hunter had told me? Never shoot one in the gut, for they won't die for days and it drives them mad. It's then that they gore you!

And that was just where my shot had gone. I couldn't even see a mark from the others. How could I have missed them? Were the sights off? . . . Was I? The elephant turned slowly and I slipped back toward the centre of the tree.

The elephant was puzzled. I could almost read it in his red, watery eyes. He knew he had seen me there

last and he seemed to know I could not have got far away. He kept turning slowly, his trunk out sniffing the air. Several times he almost faced me, but each time, just a second before his trunk would be pointing toward the tree, he would turn and sniff the other way. Then all at once he started to walk away. I almost cried for joy. He was going away! I could get the gun.

He had taken about twelve steps when I started to squirm out—fifteen when I was clear of the tree. In three jumps I would have the gun and safety. Then, as I was about to leap for it, he turned again and saw me. Trumpeting fiercely, he charged wildly at the tree. I scrambled back not a second too soon, for he butted into the roots and the outside ones gave way. He stood there, his beady eyes gazing at me, his trunk lashing and trumpeting. He butted again and again; the roots bent in and I shrieked. I was so afraid that I shrieked and babbled like a madman.

The elephant butted one side and then another, and finally he started to grab the outside roots and pull them out with his trunk. He pulled one; it came away like a green weed jerked from the ground. He took another; then two at once! As he got closer, I could feel the hot wind from the two dripping air holes. It smelled—it smelled of the circus; he was closer, he was trumpeting in my face! I backed away toward the other side of the tree; but he came there and pulled the roots from that side, and always he came closer.

His side was bleeding, his breath was coming in spasmodic heaves. He was working faster now and there were perhaps twenty shoots between us. He pulled away three, four . . . six. The end of his trunk could touch me. It did and I kicked at it. He squealed and pulled faster—eight—eleven . . . I was sweating . . . I could almost touch his head. God! . . . God! . . . end it. . . . I started to cry. I felt very limp. My heart was thundering in my head. I wanted to die . . . but quickly.

Through the heavy pounding in my ears I gradually

heard another sound. The sound of a bird—*Bu-feu* the natives called them—the hunter's bird. They whistle their note to signal each other in the forest. It came three times. It meant, "I am coming."

I managed somehow to answer it and the call came again; above the crashing of the elephant, above my own heartbeat! Momo, coming to help me. I peered frantically through the few remaining roots. Something fluttered in the thicket beyond; a brown bird—a brown bird had called to me——

The elephant had come around to the other side again. It was a matter of seconds now. If only they would pass quickly! I didn't care much now. After that brilliant ray of hope, the dismal endless drop had finished me.

The elephant clutched at my leg. As I kicked free, I screamed, and I heard the birdcall come again! Another piercing sting of pain; the calls again—I looked without hope, but I looked. And I saw Momo, I saw him smiling. His gun was up and he crept forward. The elephant was pulling the last roots away, his rough skin scratching my leg; the leg was bleeding.

I heard the shot and then a shrill trumpet, and the grey hulking mass fell against the tree.

I wasn't conscious of crawling out from beneath that tree. I was in the open running stiffly toward Momo, my eyes wet and burning, my breath coming sharply; to get away, to run as far as possible from the grey thing lying in that place where I might have been lying instead.

As I reached him, the hunter fell at my feet, and because my head was swimming and I was still literally ill with fright, I thought I hadn't understood his first words.

"*Mahsahgie*," he said, "you have given me my life."

I shook him. "What are you saying, Momo? You saved me; I would have been dead if you hadn't come."

He held my legs tightly and then bent down and

touched my foot with his head. "Ah, no, *Mahsahgie*," he said, "you cannot fool me. I know that you brought the witch to the tree and held him there so that I might kill him for my son!" He looked up happily at me: "Your power is greater than all. You have given me my life."

Chapter XVI

THERE was a sickening smell of burned elephant meat in the air, and with it—smothering it out entirely when the wind blew toward my hut—was another odour, less pleasant, if possible, than the first. It came from day-old chunks of meat which had not yet been burned, or “smoked,” as the natives chose to call the process. Greyish-pink in colour, they lay in great woven hampers a score of yards from my door, the sun beating down on them and flies buzzing round in great swarms. A group of men walked over toward the baskets and started to drag them away. The breeze shifted and a little gust of wind whirled up a pile of ashes which lay before the door. I gagged and put my handkerchief over my mouth quickly.

“Don’t tell me they’re going to smoke that stuff, too!” I asked.

Vahnee nodded. “They will smoke all that is left,” he said. “There is real famine now and no food must be wasted. They need more—much more—for there are many hungry children to feed in the villages.”

I lay back on the cot. A hot breeze stirred again and with it the smell. I held my hand over my nose.

“It will be very fine to get home,” I mumbled, and then closed my eyes.

It was the day after Momo had saved me from the

elephant. It seemed such a long time, such a measureless age.

The night before all the meat had been cut and brought into the town. It was a great and solemn occasion; a witch had been vanquished. A large part of the elephant was heaped up on a massive pyre over the grave of the king who had come to haunt his people, and they, when the fires were lighted under it, filed slowly by and each bent low before the sizzling flames to offer up his prayer to the departed spirit. They were sorry, they said, that their hunters had been forced to shoot him, and they offered these, the choicest cuts of the meat, to show him their hearts still bowed down and respected all he had done in human life for their fathers.

When it came to Momo's turn to say his words he walked up to the grave proudly and, with head high, as one chief would speak to another, said: "Grandfather, I, too, am sorry, but why did you have to kill your own grandson? You must have seen the marks of Gbwitu on his chest and you must have known him as one of your blood. For this act I can never forgive you."

When the fire had burned down, the charred remains of the meat were taken to the river and, with more prayers and fetish holding, dropped into the current and carried out of sight. The dead chief, I was told, would come down and lift it from the river to heaven, where he would give a great banquet that night. All would be forgiven then; he would never bother them again.

Late that night in the town the rest of the meat was divided among the people, each getting a choice in the order of his importance. Saybu, of course, got what was left of the heart and liver and brains, while the families of lowest birth got the skin. Even that two-inch thick leather is a delicacy in the bush—more than that when there is famine in the land. Then early in the morning they had built their drying racks and now, as Vahnee and I sat in the hut, they were smoking it with long lines of blazing fires.

Around the hut across from us a line of men were marching. Saybu was in the lead and his retinue in ceremonial dress followed behind. They knocked, then entered the hut. Saybu spoke. They thanked me, he said, for lifting their people from sorrow and fear. I was great and brave and they would sing of me in their chants for wars and seasons to come, but . . .

"But, *Mahsahgie*, we come now as small children who ask a *dash* of their father. We need more meat. Will you go out once again for us? There are elephants near. A great herd is coming down from Guinea, and only this morning our hunters brought news of its passing. My people need food."

His slow words ended and the hut was still. I didn't want to go out again. I had seen enough of elephants. I wanted to go back to the mission, to my good bed there, and to safety, and to the boat that would take me home. The crackling of fires came from beyond and a child's laughter rose from the river. I looked up at Vahnee; he was nodding pleasantly.

I shrugged my shoulders helplessly.

"We will go," I said. "In the morning we will start."

It was dawn and the air was damp and cool; the river slept beneath us in a low-hung winding of mist. It was fluffy and murmured as it moved. The village was silent. Momo and a strange man stood before me with the other boys and Vahnee grouped behind.

"This is D'yahmah, my bush brother, a hunter from Mahsahndah," Momo explained. "He will go with us, for he, too, has heard and his people have sent him to see you."

I nodded and Momo lifted his hand; the man knelt before me, laying his gun at my feet. He pressed his forehead against them. "I greet the *Mahsahgie*," he whispered, and I touched my gun to his naked black back. Then he stood and we started down the trail toward the forest that lay to the east in sun-fringed morning mountains.

There were six of us, and we carried food enough for one day and a night in the bush. Besides Momo and his friend and Vahnee and me, Flumo and Zo had come also. They were top-notch trackers and the finest boys we had. The path skirted the river and we followed a mile or so, then crossed in canoes and headed back along an unused trail toward the place where the chief said the herd of elephants had been seen. The ground was wet and spongy and the bush not too thick, perfect conditions for tracking. We trotted along at a good pace for an hour and a half, and I found myself, in spite of the memory of the last hunt, feeling happy, even joining the boys in a low monotonous chant about the worthlessness of lazy coast-girls. Soon I was glancing about for tracks like the two hunters, and by the time the second hour had passed, with the sun up, I was as anxious as they and could hardly wait to hit a fresh trail and be hot on the chase again.

When we came to the low, fern-shrouded bank of a stream, I was laughing and excited. There were fresh tracks across from us, and it looked as though we should come up for a shot before noon. The indentations which the elephants' feet had made in the mud were large, and the water in them was still moving and brown with particles of mud that had not yet settled. The hunters looked toward them and started to chuckle.

"Before the sun is there," they said, pointing to eleven o'clock in the sky, "we shall see the elephants. The signs are good in the forest!" Then we started to wade across the shallow, swift-running water. In the middle of the stream I looked up. There was a fluttering sound in the leaves of the bank beyond. A brown bird with long yellowish tail feathers hopped out on a limb and ruffled up its wings. *Ku-ah, ku-ah, kah kah* it called, and the notes rang clear and fresh on the early morning air. Momo and the boys clapped their hands and started to shout and laugh.

"It is good—it is good, *Mahsahgie*! See—the signs are *all* good!"

Then, as their voices died away and we started on across, the bird flew over to the left side of the trail and perched on a twig close down by the foot of the path. I stopped short and held my breath in fear. The men in front stopped, too. We did not move; one of Momo's feet was raised out of the water and he held it there, big drops dripping from his toe. A moment passed; nothing happened. I took a deep breath and Momo lowered his foot slowly. It looked as though things would be all right, then: *Ku-ah, ku-ah, kah kah . . . Ku-ah, ku-ah, kah kah kah* it called again, and I knew, for that day at least, the hunt was over.

In the upper Gola country there is a time-honoured belief that this bird, the traveller's bird, as they call it, has the power to predict the outcome of a venture. If he calls on the right of the trail it means all is well, but if he calls on the left it means that the trek is doomed to failure, if not disaster.

But this time, I argued, since we had heard the bird first on the right side, the calls on the left meant nothing.

"Ah," Momo answered, "but you forget that when you hear it first on the right side of the trail and then twice on the left it means two men will die if you go on."

I changed my plan of attack.

"Never fear," I said, not without a blush. "You have seen my power and you know that nothing can happen to me."

"True," he answered, "nothing can happen to you, *Mahsahgie*, for your power is greater than all the birds in the forest. You will not die, but two of us will."

There was nothing to be done. They refused to move a step forward, so we turned back. When we crossed the river I asked Momo when we would be able to start out again.

"Not for three suns," he answered. "The omen is

very bad, and it will take much medicine to change it."

I planted my feet down mule-fashion. "Three suns!" I shouted. "If we have to wait three suns I'll start for the coast tomorrow!"

Momo shook his head sadly.

"The spirits say three suns. We dare not go before the time is up."

"That's that, then," and I shrugged my shoulders. "I can't wait three suns, Momo. I have to get a boat and go home to my clan. I haven't seen them for a whole rice season. . . ."

He looked down and fingered his black medicine bracelet.

"Will three suns more be too long for them to wait?" he asked quietly.

"No, three suns more won't be too long, but if I don't get down to the great water my boat will go and I'll have to wait moons for another to come."

Momo looked up quickly, his face beaming with a relieved smile:

"Never worry about that, *Mahsahgie*. If you stay the three suns and shoot for us I will let you have my boat to go to see them in, and you can give it to your father as a *dash* from me."

He pointed proudly toward the water-logged dug-out tied to the bank with a piece of rattan fibre.

There seemed nothing to say to that, so we jogged on to the town in silence.

When we came to my hut I made it clear that if he couldn't talk his spirits into changing their minds, I would leave for the coast the next morning. Then I gathered all the boys together and told them—in a voice loud enough for even the brown bird to hear—that, much as I regretted it, we were starting home in the morning.

The boys went at once for their gear, and in a very short time it was packed and in boxes—and the boxes conspicuously piled outside my hut. Villagers came



Up the river to Kobolia. In a dry time I could jump across this river.

After three days of incessant rain, the river was a mile wide

and looked anxiously. Was the white *Mahsahgie* really going home? Wouldn't he stay and shoot for them?

All through that day Momo never showed his face and, when in the night he had not come, I began to think our Kongbah trip was really over. Then early the next morning I was awakened by *fangha* drums. And in a few minutes Momo rapped on my door, and this time he came, not as a hunter, but as a chief and medicine man. Attendants behind him, drummers in front, a sword in hand, and gold-embroidered gown dragging, he swept through the door and his men gathered in behind. A minute of hushed silence, then he cleared his throat. His words were cold and spoken as though to a tree.

"The spirits have spoken, White Chief." He paused and fumbled with the gold twisted hilt of his sword. "They have spoken and they say that we may go into the bush for meat this very sun. . . ."

A shout went up from the crowd, and as they jumped about clapping their hands, the drums beat a rhythmic call to the medicine dance. A patter of bare feet, a swishing of oily, swaying bodies, and Momo and I were alone. He looked at me and a faint smile twitched at his lips.

"Will you let me take it, Massah?" Flumo whispered as Momo and Vahnec walked down the trail from the hut.

"Take what?" I asked.

"You know," he said, pointing to the old .22 Winchester repeater lying against the side of the chop box.

"But why take that, Flumo?"

"Oh—just to take . . . ahead of the rest," he added quickly. I smiled. He was grinning too.

"All right," I said, and he picked up the gun and ran down a shorter path to the water.

For the next three hours no one saw him, but during that time strange sounds had floated back to us on the still, leafy air. *Pnink . . . pnink . . .* they would come, then a period of silence. *Pnink . . . pnink . . .*

pnink, they would sound again, and no one seemed to know what he was shooting at. No one seemed to care—at least no one asked questions. We went on quietly; the sounds came at rare intervals—always from beyond—just two turns ahead in the trail. When we caught up with him he was sitting quietly at the side of a broad, freshly made cross-break in the path. His legs were stretched out in front, and with an active finger he busied himself too intently with a toe. The gun lay over his knees.

It was easy to see what had made the break in the trail. On either side, coming in from the left and going off toward the right, a wide avenue had been freshly forced through the jungle. There were all the familiar signs of browsing elephants. Stripped branches standing out white and ghostly in a sombre forest, leaves trampled down and balls of pulp from which the juices had been squeezed scattered about as though carelessly thrown aside. When we turned and started to follow the new trail Momo paused and rubbed his head a moment.

"Strange that we have heard no traveller bird," he said, then forced a frown and started down the new path.

"Yes, it is," I heard Flumo sigh under his breath, and when he bent forward a second later to cut a vine that had caught about my feet I saw a little tuft of familiar yellow tail feathers from a traveller's bird sticking from his woolly head. As the cutlass came down and freed me another tuft came into view fastened prominently on his ivory armlet. It was tied with fresh rattan, and I was sure it had not been there when we started out.

We walked from dawn until dark that day. We followed a hundred different trails, range after range of hills; at times into dark, forbidding swamps where the sun never came and the air was musty and thick and smothering like steamy hothouse air; then across a sluggish river and up a rocky hillside where the vines were soft persistent hands that reached out to hold us

back. Up and up we would go until we gained the top and felt the cool breeze touch our faces. Mountains stretched below, fresh green like sun-sprinkled hills and soft as a mossy glade. Rivers, distant like golden snakes, curled in and out, seeming to hold the hills together—a glittering thread that moulded and made them one.

Every year at the start of the rainy season great herds of elephant come down from the mountain bush into the lower country. The water falls on the coast first, and they travel down to eat the fresh, green shoots. It was plain that we were in the midst of one of these migrations. There was no way of telling how many there were in it, but from the number of tracks it looked as though there were about two hundred. They were not moving in one large mass, but in pairs or groups of seven or eight. The section of bush we were in was made up of a series of high hills with broad mucky swamps between them. We would pick up fresh tracks on the dry ground and then, when we had come close on them—often could hear branches breaking ahead—they would pass down into a swamp and their tracks would be lost among the hundreds of other fresh tracks made that day.

We made camp on the banks of a stream that flowed down from the mountainside, and as soon as we could we all went into the cool clear water. We had been walking steadily for fourteen hours and, as I lay down on a moss-covered rock in the current, I realized for the first time that I was tired.

In the bush it is a custom for men who are bathing to group themselves downstream in the order of their importance, and so, following out their own classifications, I was at the top, with Momo and Vahnee next, and D'yahmah, Flumo and Zo below them. We were lying casually and in a completely carefree manner, enjoying ourselves thoroughly, when, above the tinkling of the water, distinctly and close at hand, three loud thumps came from the bank beyond. I could feel myself stiffen in the suddenly icy water.

It sounded like someone beating down damp sod with a tamper.

"*Kamah!*" Momo whispered and got up, creeping toward his gun.

"They are near—just beyond the leaves," Vahnee said, and I was out of the water, too, going for mine. It looked as though the hunt would be over before the first night came.

That thumping sound is well known to all who have hunted elephants, as familiar as the rumbling stomach noises that come from a feeding herd. Sand fleas, or jiggers, get up into the sole of the elephant's foot, and when he stands he often pounds his feet on the ground to stop the itching. It is a good sound, for it means they are resting and do not know you are near, but when you hear it just a step above you it's disconcerting.

Momo and D'yahmah paused only long enough to pick up their guns and fasten on charm bracelets, and I—thinking, of course, that we would have our shot in twenty steps—didn't bother to put on anything but sneakers. Then, guns in hand, we crossed the stream and crept up the bank.

But when we got there the elephants were gone. The tracks showed a large bull with a cow and baby calf, and while we stood glancing about like three young boys hiding from a farmer in the bushes behind a swimming hole, we heard, not far off, the swish of leaves as great bodies pushed beneath them. We started off. The elephants were very close and had not yet got our wind. They browsed on slowly, and we slung along behind trying to make no sound and at the same time come up for a shot.

There is always apt to be trouble when a cow and calf are together. The old one will charge at the least sound, and because of that I was not anxious to shoot until I was sure of my aim. Once, half an hour after starting out, we heard twigs and wet branches snapping beyond the turn in a stream bed, and running up saw three dusky grey hulks loom out of the gloom a

hundred and fifty yards ahead. The calf was first with the cow behind, hurrying it along with her trunk. Last came the bull, his great ears flapping and his trunk twitching nervously as he swung it from side to side. One long, gleaming, golden-brown ivory was visible, and I lifted my gun to fire. There was no sure shot, for the sights were dim blots in the fading light, but there was a chance. I started to squeeze the trigger, and then I lowered the gun. At best there was a wounded elephant—at worst they would be back on us.

The cow turned, helping the calf into the green bank before her, and they quickly disappeared. The bull pushed in behind them, his ivory gleaming palely against the shimmering leaves.

We followed desperately for another fifteen minutes, but were soon stumbling, and I realized for the first time that it was almost dark. It was a terrifying sensation. The sun had gone down and, as it does in the bush near the Equator, darkness was sinking fast about us. We were naked and had no matches; the camp was almost an hour away; where, I hadn't the slightest idea. A cold drizzle had begun to fall and I shivered. The big drops felt like icicles sliding down my back.

I was cold and uncomfortable and frightened, and, even though I had faith in a bushman's ability to find his way through the jungle against most odds, it seemed impossible to get back that night when we were in strange country and had come too fast to take proper precautions.

I said as much to Momo, said it at some length and not too pleasantly, I'm afraid, but he only laughed heartily and seemed slightly incredulous that I should think it difficult.

"Put your hand on my shoulder, *Mahsahgie*," he explained easily, "and bend down when I bend down, for we shall be passing under a low branch or tree. It is nothing. We shall soon be in camp."

And so we started back; Momo first with the two

guns, I next with a hand on his shoulder, and D'yahmah behind with his hand on mine.

There are many degrees of darkness, but none to compare with a starless rainy night in the depths of a dripping jungle. That rich, seeping oily blackness that seems almost to penetrate into your pores is something which stands entirely by itself. Through this we went and never once did we see even a speck of light from a firefly. It was a weird feeling, to say the least, going down hills, crossing streams and curving up steep trails, now bending low and the next moment standing up straight—knowing you were in the midst of a dense forest, but never so much as brushing a tree or bumping your head on a branch. Once, when Momo leaned forward, I put up my hand to find out if anything was really above us. A thick broken branch was across the trail, and as I touched it I couldn't help shuddering. It was a horribly uncanny sensation.

As we were passing down a rocky gully Momo suddenly stopped. I felt him grow tense and his muscles stiffen. Then quickly he handed me my gun and whispering "Leopard!" took a slow step back. None of us moved. My breathing seemed uncommonly loud, but above it I could hear him sniffing the air jerkily like a pointer feeling the wind for birds. From somewhere in the black ahead there came a low scratching sound, then a sneezy, guttural cough. I grew cold all over, and a wave of hot blood rushed through my head. My eyes burned and I gripped the gun with hands that were dripping and numb. Momo jumped forward.

"Go, leopard!" he shouted. "A white man comes!"

I jumped. I couldn't help it. I felt as though my whole stomach had dropped out. There was a sound—a sound of swishing leaves, then dead, empty silence.

"He is gone," Momo said calmly, as though a fly had flown out the window, and walked on again.

A few minutes later I smelled smoke, and soon afterward saw the flames of a fire cutting knifelike through

the darkness and the trees. Vahnee walked to the stream to greet us; the other boys didn't even bother to leave the pot of rice they were working over. It was as though nothing had happened, or perhaps as if we'd been out for a little jaunt in a pleasant countryside, instead of trekking through a wild jungle with a cat-man to guide us back.

It was ten o'clock the next morning and we stood on the steep side of a thickly wooded hill. There were tracks at our feet, and they led down toward a swamp which we knew would be at the bottom. The tracks were an hour old, and there was no doubt that we had lost the elephants again. Momo called the halt. He had been watching me carefully and, I think, had seen the disappointed look on my face. This was the ninth time we had followed a good set only to lose them when things looked most hopeful.

He took several steps back, and Vahnee and the boys walked up to him. I leaned against a tree. They spoke together a moment and then Momo looked at me.

"It is for you to say now, *Mahsahgie*," he said, and his voice had a disappointed dullness in it. "If we go forward," he swung his cutlass in a graceful gesture toward the swamp, "we will surely find elephants, and if we go back toward Zuwi," he pointed up the trail we had come, "there is a chance that we will find them also. They are all about us, but our rice is eaten and you are tired. You must say which path we follow—back to the town or on farther into the forest?"

There was only one answer so far as I was concerned. We would go back. This sort of hunting was too hopeless—we might trek on for weeks and then never shoot anything. But just as I was about to say it Vahnee caught my eye. "Will you turn back now . . . will you walk into Zuwi with nothing?" he seemed to say, and I wanted to throw my gun at him. "Oh, rot! It isn't so important as all that," I glared back.

"We will go forward," I said presently, trying to act as though I had decided.

"It is good, *Mahsahgie*," Momo whispered, nodding his head. "It is a good choice and the spirits will send us luck for this."

He turned and we started down the hill.

We had hardly taken ten steps when we came to an opening in the vines made by a falling tree through which we could see down into the valley below. There, on the other side of the swamp, not a quarter of a mile away, were two elephants. They pushed slowly through the mud and, as we watched, started into the thick vines of the hill beyond. They shouldered along like smooth grey tanks, and as they moved out of sight Momo turned to me excitedly.

"You see, *Mahsahgie*! There is the good sign already. Ah," he shook his head and smiled, "your power is very great—your medicine is stronger than all men's. See—see what it has done for us; and so soon, too!"

I was getting rather used to being given credit for everything good and blamed for nothing that went wrong, and I felt rather pleased with myself as we started pell-mell down the hill.

The fact that we had seen these elephants go out the far side of the swamp was almost the same as having shot them. It meant that instead of slushing up to our waists through clinging muck we could go around the dry fringe and pick up the trail there; it meant that when we arrived at the spot where we had seen them last we would know they were only a short distance ahead of us. It was the best thing that could have happened. The wind was in our favour and we knew exactly where they were.

When we came to the place, I was out of breath and all of us trembling with excitement. As the two hunters fastened on their charm bracelets and slid the spears down into their guns a noise came from the hill above us. It was of loosened stones and shale rolling down, and a moment later we heard a branch snap as it was

torn from a tree. They were only halfway up the hill, and we started after them cautiously. This was the perfect chance.

The path got steeper and wound off to the side while the mud from the elephants' legs grew dry on the leaves they had brushed against. They were gaining on us, and we started to walk more rapidly. The thick, low growth gave way to tall-treed jungle, with occasional breaks where the sun filtered through in pale and sickly patches. The signs were getting older looking all the time, and in a desperate hope we increased our speed even more, not paying quite so much attention to caution and silence. We could not let these elephants get away from us. That would be the last straw.

Then, as we rounded a steep turn, the hill abruptly levelled off into a gloomy, flat plateau. Giant, moss-hung trees stood all around like ghostly sentinels, and matted leaves formed a sun-proof roof overhead. There were heavy vines curling along over the ground like writhing snakes, and ahead of us, where the tracks led, they reared up into what seemed to be the mouth of a grape-vine tunnel. We walked to the entrance and no one spoke. Momo bent down and started to crawl into it; D'yahmah followed him. I looked at Vahnee a moment, then I bent down, too, and the others moved in behind me. It was dusky and the bare vines were thick above our heads. The two hunters worked themselves along cautiously, and I scarcely breathed. There was no sound but the rub of our bodies against the leaves. When we straightened up the vines went up with us. It was a tunnel that would have given shelter to a small dog, and that was capable of great enough expansion to accommodate an elephant. A hundred feet in we came to a pile of droppings. As I passed by my leg touched them. They were still warm.

There is no animal that likes to have his back scratched quite so much as an elephant. He will rub against trees until all the bark is off, and against the

huts on rice farms until the walls cave in. This tunnel seemed to be the answer to an elephant's back-scratching prayer. The vines were anywhere from wrist to leg thickness, and at one time they had all spread flat on the ground as they were along the other part of the plateau. Countless years before some ingenious young elephant had probably lifted up some of them and pushed underneath to get the ticks off his back and a good rubdown to boot. Then he told his friends about it, and through wars and rice seasons they had followed his trail until now they had made a regular tunnel out of it—a tunnel which rose up ten or twelve feet as they went under, sinking down to three or four when their bodies had passed beneath. A rough path was worn in the centre and smaller vines grew on the sides and over the top. It was a little curving world in itself, and after we had been in it two minutes I wanted to get out. It hemmed us in—hardly ever could we stand up straight without pushing the vines up with us, and it gave me the feeling of a run leading into a trap.

Vahnee was carrying my gun, and after we had taken fifty or more steps I suddenly had a strong feeling that I wanted to carry it myself. There was no sound, and the added weight only made the stumbling along harder for me, but still I wanted it. "What a fine place to meet an elephant," I thought with a little shudder, and then felt better when the weight was in my hand. It was like having a life preserver in your cabin on a boat. You are fairly sure you won't use it, but just the same it's nice to see it there.

When we reached the centre of the tunnel there was a sharp turn, and as I came to it I could see a bright light a hundred yards down that showed where the vines ended. It was a comforting sight, and I looked back to signal the boys. Momo and I were together, with Vahnee thirty feet behind us. D'yahmah came next about thirty feet behind him, then Flumo and Zo, their loads holding them back, as they struggled along last, each fifty or so feet apart. I lifted my hand,

pointing toward the end, and they grinned. They liked this sort of trekking even less than I.

At the place where the tunnel turned it grew narrow, and for ten or twelve paces sagged very low to the ground. Thick rotting vines hung down, and the two of us, as we started through, had to get on our knees and push the guns in front. When we were right in the midst of this patch I thought I heard a sound of breaking branches at the end toward which we were going; I looked quickly at Momo. He had heard it too, and his eyes got wide; his body grew stiff and rigid. He looked like a black setter frozen to a point—he was down on all fours and his right hand was lifted up under him. Instinctively I pulled the gun back; as I did the crashing came again and with it a shrill trumpet. Then while I watched, too terrified even to blink, the end of the tunnel grew dark as a great mass blotted the sun out. At the same time the vines started to shake violently overhead, and little bits of dusty bark showered down upon us.

To say I was terrified doesn't explain my state. I had gone beyond that with the first sounds we had heard, and now, caught helpless between the vines, with the great mass thundering down on us, I felt a blank nothing. An elephant was charging us, but I was dumb and paralysed; I felt as though I were made of cement, bags of cement left overnight in the rain with a hard, thick crust on the outside and crumbly lumps beneath. The beast thrashed its trunk about, and the vines shivered up over its head. It was moving fast, squealing as it came; it was very close—halfway to us—and still I had no feeling. Momo had not even lowered his hand. Though I clutched the gun tightly, I couldn't lift it. I felt stunned.

Then Momo suddenly turned. He lifted his hand and pointed. He looked happy beyond words, and his voice was low—almost reverent—when he spoke.

"*Mahsahgie*, look! My Master comes. Shoot!"

I stared at him—I did not move. The bark was falling thick about us and a long grey piece had stuck

in his kinky hair. It looked like a feather in an Indian's scalp-lock—it was set at just the right angle. "*My Master comes*" . . . What a way to say it!

As I lifted the gun I thought, "What do I do about it?" Shoot? . . . Shoot where? . . . At what? There was no spot to pick. Just a grey, thrashing body, but nothing to aim at.

"*Mahsahgie!*"

The elephant was almost on top of us. I pointed the gun up and fired. No special place—just at the massive forehead from which the trunk writhed like a python chopped in two, and the tusks curved down like broad round rockers on a chair. The shot thundered out—it seemed a thousand miles away and at the same time almost in my ear. Something crashed down on my shoulder, and a sharp sting burned through my head as I rolled over. Then there was a heavy thud and the ground trembled under me. A rain of dust and twigs showered noisily over my face—then silence. I struggled to my knees. Something warm and heavy lay across them. It was greyish black and quivered; it was bristly and the end of it twitched. It was the elephant's trunk, and I looked along it to the base. The head was hardly four feet from me. It filled the whole tunnel and the tusks were run down into the ground. It did not move and there was no blood. I had escaped a crushing death by a bare fraction.

I looked at the gun. A line of smoke curled up over the front sight, clinging halfway along the barrel. The cutting smell of powder was sharp in my nose. It seemed incredible that it was dead: that tremendous body downed by one shot; and yet it was, for it was still and a stream of red spurted out, a little at first, then farther down the centre of the head. It was streaming over my legs, sticky and warm; it smelled like a cut finger.

And still I couldn't move. I wanted to, for the blood covered my legs and was making me sick, but I had no power to crawl back. I looked at the grinning boys and tried to say, "He's dead," for those were the

only words in my mind, when, like hideous noises in a ghastly nightmare, I heard the sound of another elephant trumpeting and the scattered crashing of brush to the left of the tunnel. My heart missed a beat and I twisted about. There was a bright flash before my eyes and a deadening roar in my left ear. Momo had fired his spear gun out through the walls of the tunnel; it had gone off almost in my face. I felt as though someone had thrown a giant firecracker at me and it had exploded right on the end of my nose. It blinded me for a moment, and the shock completely stunned me. I slumped forward and my stomach seemed to roll up into my mouth.

Then Momo shook me and I lifted my head. He pointed frantically down the other end of the vine tunnel. At first I could see nothing—only that blinding flash—but as it blinked away I saw the light again coming through the opening. The boys scattered along in a line. They were just as they had been when I turned to signal them that I could see the other end. The only changes were their expressions. Now they did not grin. Could it be that only a few seconds had passed? As the thought went through my mind they all looked away from me. Their faces were toward the opening behind them. It was light, and shafts of sun streaked over the entrance. Then all at once it, too, became dark and the brightness was gone. The roof above began to shake again and the fragments of bark and dry mud to fall. The other elephant was charging down from the far end. I could see it and I could feel the tremble of ground beneath me; I knew that in a moment it would come to the first boy, but I heard nothing and I could not shoot. My head felt as though it were split in two.

Of the scene that followed I remember every moment. It was like a silent moving picture shown in slow motion; I have lived it countless times since. The last in the line of boys was Zo. He was only a short distance past the entrance, and as the vines flew up and the elephant came on to him he fairly flew into

the air, up against the vaulted roof of the vine tunnel. Numb though I was, it reminded me of a sketch I had seen when I was a small child. It was of a naked native being tossed into the air by a charging rhino. The man's arms and head were thrown back and his legs shot out at wild angles. So it was with Zo, and then he slumped to the ground in a tangle of vines, and the elephant passed on and I could not see him.

Flumo was next. He was pulling himself up to the vines and his body hugged tight against them. As the elephant passed it was as though he had been a pencil spun on its point on a table. He twisted around several times, and then he was gone, too, buried in the leafy wall.

D'yahmah managed to crawl halfway through the vines, out of the run, but when the elephant reached him his legs and the lower part of his body were still sticking out in the path. As it crashed past he was jerked clear on to the centre again, and the last thing I saw of him were a pair of legs and arms kicking into the air as he clung to the vines and the massive grey shape passed by.

As it came on to Vahnee, Momo shouted and shook me by the arm. I saw his mouth open and felt the breath in my face, but I heard no words. He wanted me to shoot. I knew that, but I could not. I would have hit Vahnee. The great legs rose and fell like lead piledrivers, and the ceiling of vines swung up like a sheet when a puppy runs under it. The elephant came nearer and I tugged at the gun. The barrel was caught on a vine and in that instant I gave up. I did not even try to pull it free. It seemed hopeless, for there wasn't a chance of a shot, and the large feet were almost on Vahnee. As they came down he fell to his knees. He was calm and there wasn't a sign of fear on his face. Then, in spite of everything, I almost laughed. Vahnee was bending forward with his hands up over his head, and when the front feet passed over him he bowed down as the Mohammedans do when they turn to Mecca at prayer time. He was a Christian

convert, and in that moment of near-death I thought he had gone back to his old faith. The body passed above him, and between the legs I saw him still lying there. He had not moved a finger, nor had the elephant touched him. It was like an act in a circus.

In the next five seconds three things happened with lightning speed. The elephant was only thirty feet away and as I looked motionless while it came nearer—its ears bent back by the vines—Momo struck me across the face. His hand stung my cheeks, and instinctively I pulled down the lever and lifted the gun. It was a useless move and I knew it, but I fired. The report was distant and muffled; it sounded as though it came from a far-off canyon. I shot at the head, but the elephant rumbled on as though I had fired a blank. I had missed! Then something dark and shiny darted in front of me. It was Momo. He braced himself and held his elbows out at the side. He stood between me and those charging tons of flesh. He had jumped there—in front of me—and the elephant would hit him first. The wind swished above us, and I saw his black eyes gleam, his jaw was set; then he flew forward and crashed against me, and my teeth felt jerked from my head. Everything went black; a soft, lovely blackness sank over the world and I sank with it. Down . . . down, like lying on wonderful night-velvety feathers that caressed and were soft as heaven.

I opened my eyes again. At first I saw nothing, and then there were black vines and mud was on them. Where was I now, and what was this other world? Why did I lie here, and why that awful smell and the black vines and the swishing, windy sound of heavy breathing above me?

I turned. A man lay at my side. He was black, and red blood streamed from his mouth and nose. His eyes were closed and his hand lay over my chest. It was Momo, but why did he lie there, and why did his hand seem to try to protect me? why was there blood? I looked beyond him. Bright sunlight was far down a narrow, dark shaft, and men lay scattered

all along it. They lay and did not move, and the one nearest was Vahnee. He was praying like a Mohammedan. I knew it was Vahnee, for my water bottle was in front of his head and it was all squashed out flat and water made the canvas splotchy. Then I started to cough and my head began to spin, and there was something sour in my mouth. I spat it out and more came. It was rice; it was bitter like a copper penny I had sucked once when I was little, and it kept coming up and I couldn't breathe, and it filled my mouth and nose. It made everything black again, and I felt it slide hot over my chin and neck and then there wasn't any feeling, and I hoped I would go back to the other world where it was soft and wonderful; but I did not.

Momo looked at me, and Vahnee looked at me; and Flumo and Zo and D'yahmah looked, and their eyes were dull and they just looked and didn't say anything for a long time. There was that same windy sound of laboured breathing above me, and I could not think what it came from. I could not think why they all looked at me and why there was so much blood on them or why their eyes had a don't-care look of empty dullness in them. Then Momo lifted his hand and pointed over my head. A slimy clot of blood fell from his nose and was dusty on the bottom when he put his hand down and it turned over.

"*Kamah . . . Kamah, ah mah-fah,*" he said, and I couldn't think why he kept saying the elephant wasn't dead. What elephant?

I turned my head and above me—I could almost touch them—were two legs that looked like muddy trunks of trees. They moved up and down slowly at the low joints and from beyond them came the windy sound. Then the whole picture came back and I knew why there was blood and dull eyes and why my head ached and I vomited bitter rice. I knew why we lay there and what I was expected to do, but I felt too tired even to lift my hand. I didn't care what happened, but those silent eyes kept staring at me, and so



Female ward in the hospital

I reached for the gun. The stock and forearm were split, but the shell went in when I pulled the lever up. We lay there and waited and the elephant finally got to his feet. When he turned his head I fired, and he fell down; and everything got dark again. I hoped it would stay dark always, for I was afraid of their eyes.

When we had pulled ourselves together, we looked one another over, and finding—why, I shall never know—nothing but bruises and cuts, set about binding them up. Momo was the worst off, for the whole left side of his face, shoulder and legs were scraped as though rough sandpaper had been pulled over them. Also he bled from the nose and mouth, but it was not, as I had feared at first, internal, and soon stopped. The gauze that the small emergency kit held was entirely used up on him, and, though he objected strenuously at first, I think he felt quite proud of his trimmings when the business was over.

For the rest of us, strips of khaki torn from my two bush shirts did very well, and, though we didn't look nearly so impressive, a strong solution of potassium permanganate doused over all open cuts made us quite as antiseptic and quite as uncomfortable, too, as the fantastically decorated Momo.

When we were rested a bit, we set about trying to find out why the two animals had behaved in such a strange manner, for usually elephants will get away at the first sound or smell of man; they won't charge unless they have a good reason. We couldn't understand why an old cow, the first one which we shot, would be so anxious to trample us.

The first surprise came when we traced the tracks through the tunnel and found that the elephants we had been following had gone on down the other side of the mountain and that these two had been browsing several hundred yards to the side. The cow had been fifty yards from the bull, and her tracks led straight to the entrance, while the bull's went in wide circles

for a while and then came to the other end. But still that did not explain anything; it only made it more difficult to figure out.

A careful examination of the cow made the whole thing clear. In the right side of her head I noticed a patch of scar tissue the size of a watermelon, and in the centre of it an open sore. From this, a much corroded native spearhead stuck wedged into the bone. It was plain that she had been shot by a bush hunter years before, and she had undoubtedly associated the smell of us with the sore. The man smell had given her those horrible years of pain, and naturally she wanted to trample out every bit of it.

The bull was probably her calf or, as the natives choose to call a mate, her "friend." When she trumpeted he started toward her, but must have lost her wind until he reached the far end of the tunnel. Then he came down on us. I am sure he had nothing against us; we were just in the way.

In London they told me that, from the amount rusted off, the spear point had been in her head about seven years. She had waited a long time for her revenge!

When the hunt ends, the trunk and tail are always cut off at once to carry to the chief as a sign that the meat has been shot for him. While Momo and D'yahmah were performing this rite I was busy with compass and paper and pencil. During the twenty hours we had walked in the last two days I had kept a very careful record of our bush position in relation to Zuwi. Now, as I figured it out, I realized that I had a means of making an impression on Momo and the boys which would surely and lastingly blot out of their minds any lingering memory of my bungling in the tunnel. I knew that Vahnee had fixed the situation perfectly, but still I couldn't resist this one grand gesture.

When they had finished their work I made them all sit down while I explained the wonders of the white-man compass. I took some time doing this, and they listened attentively. Things were going well.

Then, with a royal fling of arm and a mystical smile on my face, I pointed off to the east and said:

"And by this magic white-man box I will tell you where Zuwi lies. It is there," much waving of my arm; "and tomorrow before the sun is in the middle of the sky we will see her huts on the mountain top."

I lowered my hand and took a deep breath. I felt rather proud of myself. Momo stood up slowly and started to sniff the air. He turned around several times, sniffing all the while, and then stopped and lifted his hand.

"Zuwi is there, *Mahsahgie*," he said quite simply, pointing north; "and we will come to her before this sun has gone to rest in the darkness."

I shook my head; I was pleasant but condescending.

"I'm afraid you're wrong this time, Momo. The magic thing never tells me a lie."

"Are you sure you heard it right?"

"I always have before."

"Well, ask it again."

"It's not necessary."

Momo shook his head slowly.

"Zuwi is there, *Mahsahgie*," he said, and pointed again to the north.

"Well, I won't argue with you. I know what I'm talking about, or this thing does, and we're going to do what it says."

But we didn't. Vahnee had a little chat with me and, much against my will and better judgment, we went Momo's way. Secretly I was a bit pleased, for I knew in the end they would get lost and, at a time when they needed me even more, I could come to the rescue. With much scribbling and many pointed looks at the compass we started out.

All through the first hour I had the exasperating feeling that we were walking at right angles to Zuwi, but I bided my time with silent satisfaction, for I was sure that soon I would have my chance. It would be the next day, but those extra miles would be worth it.

We were going along a steep cliff bordering a low, flat swamp two hours later, when Flumo suddenly lost his balance. He was walking in front of me, and before I could grab his outstretched hand he had fallen fifteen feet to a slab of rock below. When we got to him he had come to, but it took only one look to see that his right foot would be useless for a good many days to come. His ankle was badly broken, and while I set it and Vahnee whittled sticks for splints I explained to Momo that, since Flumo could not walk and we didn't have any way of carrying him, he should go on with the boys while I stayed there with him. We had the elephant meat for food, and when they got to the town they could send men back for us.

The truth of the matter was that I was about done in myself, and, because I was sure we were going in the wrong direction, I thought it the best plan all around to let them find it out for themselves while I conserved what energy I had left.

But Momo only looked at me blankly, as though he had not heard me, or as though I had told a funny story of which he could not get the point, and, stooping over Flumo, picked him up on his shoulders as though he were an empty bag of rice and started up the bank and into the forest. Silently I followed. Only twice in the next three hours he put him down—then it was to get a drink—and just as dusk was seeping slowly into the forest I heard a strangely familiar drum booming from a hilltop above us. Then we saw the huts of Zuwi and smelled the smoke of their fires.

I looked at Vahnee, and Vahnee looked at me. I took a piece of paper from my pocket and tore it into little pieces. Next I took out the compass. The needle spun around gaily a few turns and then calmly pointed out the north. "Hmmm," I thought, "how neatly and easily done. Just as simple as that!"

The others were ahead. People were running down to meet them and welcome shots were booming out

all over the town. I looked at the compass again. I unhooked it from the silver chain. My hand swished forward and the sun flashed bright on the crystal as it sailed down. There was a far-off plunk in the river, and a rim of ripples rolled out. "Hmm," I thought again. "Just as simple."

Chapter XVII

"Its power is the power of God himself. It can make men live or die," Chief Kongomah had said simply as he showed me the fetish that hung from his wrist, and then solemnly touched it to my forehead and heart.

Later he had spoken more of the small, silver, box-shaped charm. It had, he told me impressively, been given to one of his fathers countless rice seasons before by a giant eagle that glided down from the sun with the fetish in its claws to light upon the shoulder of this ancestor. It was the Sun God's gift to a chief in whom he was well pleased; a chief who had ruled thoughtfully and well among his clans, but who, because he had made their people independent and rich in slaves and women, was beginning to lose his power over them. They had forgotten that he had made them all that they were and grew jealous of him. They said they needed a chief no longer, and were about to kill him when the messenger from God had come down to save his life. The eagle had put the fetish on the chief's wrist and then, while the people watched in awe, had turned into a great ball of fire and glided back to its place in the sun.

The meaning of the Sun God's miracle was clear to them all; no word had been spoken, yet they understood. If they did not love their chief they must fear him. He now—and all who were to follow after and

hold the charm—was complete master of their lives. Any man who broke a law of the tribe, if the chief touched the wristlet to his body and told him to die, would die. No other magic in the world could save him; the power of the charm had never failed.

And that was why Vahnee and Momo and I with our boys had come so far back into the Gola country, even after the too long delay we had already suffered. Our salt and my supply of tinned foods and tea and sugar had been weeks past exhausted, the boxes of medicines had been long since used up, and I myself was worn to an edge and in need of them, but we had decided to take this one last trek before turning back. Stories of the powerful fetish had made my desire to get to the coast wane at once, and since the man who now possessed it was Momo's cousin, and we were assured of a friendly reception if we went to see him, neither malaria nor the lack of proper food had been reason enough to turn us back.

Three days of walking brought us to Kongomah's town. It was in a deep, untravelled bush on the Gola border near Buzi country, and to it few white men had journeyed before. The chief had greeted me quite coldly, but after Momo talked with him for a while he had become more friendly, taking me somewhat into his confidence. It was then that he had spoken of the fetish, telling how it came to be, and even—because I was Momo's friend—giving me its blessing.

The charm in itself was nothing remarkable. As I said, it was silver and box-shaped, about two inches long, an inch and a half wide, and a third of an inch thick; it looked not unlike a battered old compact. From the top a looped silver chain came out large enough for a hand to be slipped through, and on one surface were three little pearls of silver from which—two curling out from each—ran six twisted coils. The first pearl was the symbol of God; the second, the intermediary spirits of the dead; and the third, physical man on earth. The pair of twisted coils running out from each symbolized earthly man's close relation

with himself, the spirits of his dead fathers, and his God. Inside, I was to discover later, were not, as is the usual case with fetishes, particles of bone and flesh or dried blood, but only a small, smoothed section of wood about which the charm was shaped.

Curiosity had brought me back to see that much-whispered-of object of witchcraft and the man who possessed it, but I had neither expected nor wanted to have its reputed power proved to me. This I unbelievably witnessed; the memory of what happened I have unwillingly lived over countless times since.

After three days in the town I decided that in fairness to myself—the continual grind and lack of proper food had begun to show itself—my family, who had not heard from me in some months, and my friends on the coast who had on other occasions been “worried,” I had better start the long trek down. As usual the decision came all at once, and, after telling Vahnee, I started toward the chief’s compound to make my plan known to him. He had expected me to stay several weeks and had sent for several hunters; he needed meat, and I knew that our leaving his bush would not please him.

As I neared his hut I heard a great commotion, and on reaching it saw Kongomah, hand upraised and fetish in it, standing over the trembling body of a man. Beside him stood several of his witch doctors, and in a large circle about the man thirty or more of the town people were gathered; they, too, trembled and were grey of face. The chief seemed in a trance. His body was tense and his muscles bulged as though he held a terrific weight in his hand; he stared at the prostrate body before him. Then he spoke and the voice seemed not his own; it was high-pitched and rose shrill above the mumbling of the crowd.

“This is the third time I have warned you,” he fairly squealed. “The next time you break our laws you will die!”

He turned and, followed by his medicine men, walked stiffly into the hut. A moment longer the circle

lingered, then they backed slowly away and out of sight. The man still lay on the ground. His body twitched, and as he lifted his head his eyes rolled and his jaw sagged open. As though hypnotized he got to his feet and staggered toward the far end of the town.

The man, I learned in the evening, was the black sheep of that bush and had been bothering the chief's wives and women who belonged to other men. Kongomah had presented him with two wives to try to keep him out of trouble, but it seems the man's fancy ran to women other than his own. It was true that the chief had warned him twice before; Momo assured me that if he stepped out of line again the chief would curse him and he would die.

Late that night two of the hunters arrived, and since there wasn't any way to get out of it I decided to go on the hunt. All the loads and tin boxes were stored in one hut, and I was going over them the next morning to see that they were locked when Kongomah came in. One of the boxes contained about thirty pounds in gold, silver and copper coins, and as I picked up an extra padlock to fasten on it he smiled and laid his hand on my shoulder.

"You don't need such things in my bush," he said. "They are only for the white man's country."

I was rather surprised and told him how much money there was in the trunk. But he laughed and said his people did not steal. Then he proposed that if I would put off the hunt for a day he would call his neighbouring villages in to a feast and dance that night. He said that he would scatter all the money over the dance clearing, and that if a single sixpence were missing in the morning he would give me twenty cows. It was agreed. From sunset until dawn the drums beat and hundreds of men, women and children danced over the money—more wealth than they had thought existed in all the world. Some of them picked up pieces and gazed at them curiously or rattled them in their hands, and others simply gaped at the scattered coins in awe. No one was there to watch them; the

chief had gone to a distant town for the night and had not spoken to his people before he left. I myself had scattered the coins. In the morning he and I gathered up the money from the smooth, sun-hardened clearing. Every penny of it was there. And yet for these people each shilling equalled four days of back-breaking work.

The old laws of this country are extremely interesting and humane—too humane for civilization perhaps. Two of the best, I think, say that if a man kills another man in a fit of temper he must be exiled from his forest for two rice seasons, never seeing any of his clan or friends during this time; and that if a man steals habitually the punishment is death. They argue that if a man kills another man he is "sick," and the only thing that will cure him is two years of sorrow; no sorrow is so great for those Africans as that of leaving their families and their forest and friends. When he returns after these long months of earthly purgatory he is cleansed, his sin having been washed away and his "sickness" gone. But for the man who steals—not once, but time and again—then death is the only answer. Their huts are open to the sun; nothing is tied down—how then, they ask, can they tolerate a thief? And there is almost no stealing.

I had expected we would be gone a week, but Momo's hunters were good and luck was with us. We returned in two days not only with a good supply of meat, but with a large leopard, too. It would have been reason for a victory dance had we not entered the town just in time to see the chief's great fetish at work. The scene was as it had been the time before when I saw him warn the man. But now, as the adulterer lay quivering at his feet, the chief bent down and pressed the silver fetish to his back.

"Go now, and in three days die!" he shouted. "You are cursed—the power of God has cursed you, for you have broken his law again!"

Kongomah and his men went into their compound; the gathering moved toward their huts, slowly, silently.

We stood, dumb, watching. A minute, two minutes—five minutes passed. The man did not move his arms or legs, yet he quivered violently from head to foot. Slowly he lifted his head; he looked about. His eyes were wide and white, but he did not seem to see. Then his head slumped forward. The hunters walked nervously past him and Momo looked at me a moment.

"In three days he will be dead," he said solemnly, and followed his men toward our hut.

I did not know quite what to do. I had no right to meddle in their affairs, but I walked into the chief's compound and seeing him sitting in the door of his hut went over to him. He looked strangely aged and tired. The charm was still clutched tight in his hand, and as I came near he looked up; his eyes were sad, his face almost pathetic.

"It is a weight like a mountain to kill a man," he said heavily.

"If I can make the man live will you let me have him?" I asked, not believing that he could possibly die from only the words and a touch of the fetish.

"Take him," Kongomah answered slowly. "He is yours, but he will die."

I walked back, and, lifting him, carried the trembling man to my hut.

The victim of the fetish curse was a native of about thirty. He was perfectly healthy, and there wasn't a bruise or scratch on his body. All through the rest of that day he lay in a sort of semi-conscious state, but by nightfall he seemed quite normal. We talked, and he ate and drank naturally, but during the night he began to mutter over and over that he was going to die. The next day it got worse, and by night he had slipped off into a coma again. The following day he ate nothing and his muttering was incoherent. I tried to bring him to in every way I could think of. I realized only then that the matter was serious and thought, if I could make him conscious, that perhaps we could hypnotize him, and give him the belief that

he was going to live. It was a wild chance, and it failed. He died on the third night. And he died because he believed that all men must die when the silver fetish cursed them.

It was on the far eastern edge of Buzi country in a deep, dark mountain valley that a funny thing happened. We had left Kongomah's country and, after touching our feet in Guinea, we were swinging slowly down toward Kongbah again. There was a chief in the mountain country that the boys believed the richest man in all the world; he lived in great splendour, they told me, and so we went to visit him. Kienah-Ko his name was, and because he was rich and lived in splendour and seemed not the type to be interested in trinkets and gadgets, I *dashed* him, when I left his town, not these, but a small bag of silver coin. It was gift enough to make most chiefs forget their dignity and dance for joy, but Kienah-Ko only shook the money out on a goatskin rug before him and looked at it disdainfully.

"Silver—only silver?" he asked in disgust. "I have no use for silver!"

Then he clapped his hands and two of the servants who stood behind him fanning with great plumed fans walked from the rug-draped hut and returned a moment later carrying between them, and struggling beneath its weight, a massive gold devil-head mask. It was beautifully etched and truly the work of a master. When I gasped—and the gasp was genuine—he was pleased and clapped his hands again. Gold spoons and a great gold bowl followed. Then, when a gorgeous sword with a carved ivory handle and short, solid, worked gold blade had been brought in and—from an envious heart!—I gasped again, he was definitely pleased and delighted.

"I see you love fine things," he said with a smile.

"Yes, these are most beautiful!" I managed to answer.

"Well, you shall see something truly fine, then!" he

grunted. "I bought it only a moon ago, and there is none other like it in all the great forest."

Then, in hushed confidence, he began to tell me of his most precious treasure—"a small, magic-gold stick made from the colour of sky at sunset." He spoke at great length, and it was only with much persuasion that he finally showed it to me. A thick, soft gold chain was about his neck, and slowly he pulled it from beneath his gaudy gown. Link after link came to the light and finally—the chain was at least two feet long!—the end came; fastened to it "the magic sky-coloured stick." With greedy eyes the chief looked at me, cupping the precious thing in his hands.

"Is it not wonderful!" he said in a hushed voice.

"It is too wonderful!" I answered when I got my breath, for I had almost fainted.

The thing that he showed me was a gilded ten-cent bullet pencil of the novelty variety so often used in advertising. It had a large eraser, and the centre was covered with celluloid—many-coloured celluloid, the shades of which somewhat suggested a rainbow. Bold black letters across the side proclaimed that in Paducah, Kentucky, there was a funeral home with a "Sympathetic Lady Assistant"!

I had been sent five hundred of the things some time before—not all telling of Paducah's claim to fame!—and had used them as *dashes* to children. There were at least two hundred of them in one of my boxes at the time, but I remembered, with a sigh of relief, that none had been given away this side of Kongbah. I never found out how the chief got his; he said it was a sacred object and a "cloud spirit" had sold it to him. Only after much more persuasion would he let me hold it, and when I pulled out the hidden pencil and made a blue-and-red line on a piece of paper he almost had a fit. Then I erased it. He was dumb-struck, and chirped like a child when I showed him how to do the same himself. This was the greatest magic in the world!

We left him sitting in his palaver house among his

gold. He was too engrossed in what he was doing even to wave good-bye to us. We had *dashed* him several tablets, and he sat with one on his lap, the "magic stick" clutched awkwardly in his hand. He was making blue-and-red lines on a piece of paper and then erasing them. We had secretly left enough refills to keep him happy for years. And I hope no other pencil ever drifts back into his bush.

We were still wandering about on the far side of Gola country when I finally did decide to start home. But I really did not decide myself; a bump on the head decided for me!

Momo and I were talking idly, as we trekked along one afternoon, about various bush customs and theories, and I happened somehow to tell him the story of an argument Vahnee and I had had about monkeys.

Vahnee and Flumo had told me that monkeys could talk to one another—tell stories, give warnings; and I had said that, while they might give signals and warn one another of some approaching danger, I was positive that that was all. We argued hotly for a while and then had decided to try to prove our respective theories.

To a plum tree outside my hut a band of red monkeys came every evening at dusk to get food before going up into their sleeping place on the hillside for the night. We made a bamboo trap and, tying it to a limb, caught an old fellow one afternoon. He was unhurt, and, though he made a great commotion, the others did not leave until they had eaten their fill. We took him down from the limb and kept him caged up in the house for a week. Each evening the band returned and were not bothered. Then, on the seventh night, after they had eaten and gone back into the forest, we took the captive out of his box and turned him loose in the house. He had been well fed and treated up to this point, but now we changed our tactics. Each of us got a lighted torch and, with-

out burning or really hurting him, chased him round the room, yelling and screaming for all we were worth. After ten minutes he was frightened half to death, and we caught him and put him in the cage again. The next morning he was given a tasty meal and set free.

The idea of the experiment—crude though it was—was to find out whether he could tell his band of what had happened to him and warn them not to come back. He surely told them something, and he must have been pretty convincing about it, for, though he was not a leader of the band, they never returned—proving, Vahnee and Flumo assured me, that monkeys can speak just as men do! I was at least convinced that they did more than signal danger to one another. This was not a case of the band starting for the plum tree and the mistreated member just squealing and keeping them from going, either. When we let him loose, Vahnee and I had followed silently. He found his fellows several miles away, and there had been a great and noisy discussion. It had lasted a good ten minutes, and in the end they had all trekked off. They had left a good three weeks' supply of their favourite food to rot, too.

When I had finished telling Momo the story he became quite excited. Of course, monkeys could talk, he said. Would I like to hear? Why, he himself could talk to them!

Then and there we put down the loads and the two of us started off into the bush to find a band. We soon discovered about twenty chattering and scampering around on a cliff over a stream, and creeping up close we hid ourselves in a thicket. Then Momo asked me what I wanted him to tell them to do. Hardly concealing my amusement at the question, for he asked it as he might have asked what I wanted for supper, I told him to make them come near, go back into the forest and then come to the cliff again.

He started to chatter and grunt, and the monkeys came slowly toward us. That was not so remarkable,

for they are extremely inquisitive, but when, with more grunting, they started calmly for the depths of the forest, moving deliberately, I must admit I was surprised. They disappeared among the vines and we heard them no longer. At this point Vahnee came up. The boys were anxious to get on to the town, he said, and asked if he might take them and start to make camp. It seemed a good idea, and since I wanted to see Momo "talk" more with the monkeys I told him to go ahead. When he had gone Momo began to make strange guttural sounds again, and the animals, acting almost as though they were hypnotized, returned!

Most of them sat on the limbs of trees or climbed about on vines, but a few scurried back and forth along the cliff.

"Do you want me to tell them to go down to the water?" Momo whispered, nodding toward the ones on the ground.

I managed to say "Yes"; his uncanny control over them was beginning to make my skin creep!

A minute of high-voiced chirping grunts and the monkeys began to look at one another and grunt too. Then slowly they started down the steep cliff toward the water.

"I'll tell the rest to go away and you can look over the bank and see them," he whispered when they were out of sight, and then uttered a series of low, hissing growls.

The ones in the trees started for the thick bush, and I crawled over to the cliff. Fifteen feet below the monkeys sat. They were looking at one another silently with the most perplexed expressions on their faces! They just sat there and stared. "Something is queer about this," their eyes seemed to say, "but what is it?" I crawled out farther to get a better view of them, and as I did the thing happened which started us on our rapid homeward trek. I lost my balance and clattered off the cliff into the water. I remember feeling a furry body jump almost into my face and hearing

it let out a frightened squeal; then I felt cold water and a sharp searing pain as my head hit a rock below the surface.

When I next began to take a coherent interest in things it was almost dark. I was lying near the thicket that we had hidden in, and Momo was looking down into my face with frightened eyes; his forehead was so creased with frowns it looked like a miniature brown relief map of a mountain range. I lifted my hand to rub my head—it felt horribly thick and numb—and the brown mountains went and he smiled.

"We will get to the village quickly," he said, and picking me up gently swung me over his shoulder.

Through the darkness he picked his way. I thought the trail would never end and the village never come into sight—or smell, as is the usual case at night. That trip I remember by only two things. One, a pain that with each step seemed to creep a little deeper into my head and back; and the other—by far the worst!—that embarrassing, tiring feeling that everyone has when he is being carried, or crowded into an automobile on someone's lap.

"Am I too heavy?"

"No, not at all—you're light!"

"No, I'm not. You sit on my lap. That will be better."

"Don't be silly! You're not heavy at all. . . ."

Bump, bump, bump—minutes pass; stiff-legged, uncomfortable minutes. You feel that you weigh a ton. The other person moves a little.

"Now, be a sport—you sit on my lap," you say, for the move seems to signify that your weight has become almost unbearable.

"Really, I don't mind at all. I'm quite comfortable."

"Well, I'd much rather you did. You can't be comfortable with me squashing down on you!"

"No, this is fine. . . ."

More minutes—horrible minutes; minutes of trying

to make a hundred and sixty pounds feel like ten! Your legs ache and they begin to tremble; little prickles of sweat burst out on your back and head. This is terrible! Will we never get there?

And it never seems to end.

It was so while Momo carried me along through the cool darkness of that forest night. I was a bit groggy, but not enough to let me forget that I was an uncomfortable weight on his shoulders—a weight that made his breathing thick and come in little groans as we went up hills, and his heart pound dully against my arm when we went down. I tried to make myself lighter, easier to carry, and it only made it harder for him. I mumbled that I could walk, that I was quite all right, and his voice, gasping and tired, vibrated through my body that he was all right, too. On, on, on we went—miles, I do not know how many. I felt that I was carrying his weight instead of he mine, and my whole body ached beneath that mental burden.

Then I smelled smoke and heard distant voices; we had come to the town.

The night that followed was not a pleasant one—nor the next day and its night. I spent them in more worry than pain. A large tender bump bulged out from the side of my head and bright spots continually danced before my eyes; but these I had experienced before. What bothered me most was that, when I stood, I couldn't keep my balance. I had no sense of equilibrium, and there was a feeling of great pressure on my brain. I began to think that my skull was fractured, or, at least, that I had a bad concussion. There, back in the bush, feeling very much alone and days of trekking from the nearest white man, I got a bit hysterical and it began to prey on my mind. I must have said queer things at times, for the boys had strange looks on their faces when they came near me, and once I saw Flumo, after I had asked him something, look at Peecie and shake his head in a sad, shrug-shouldered manner. Later, when he thought he was out of hearing, I heard him say: "It must happen

to white men, too," and then he sighed. And that was most disturbing.

• But things gradually cleared up and the bump went down a little. I could walk and keep my balance, and we got to Zuwi without much trouble, though I remember very little of the trip. It was just forest and more mountains and boys embarrassingly silent and watchful. The forests were beautiful, the mountains lovely beyond words. I remember climbing one with Vahnee one evening at sundown. The boys were making camp in a valley below and their voices floated up, soft on the still dusk air. We were going home, and I looked back over those hills we had passed through; the hills we were now leaving. They reached up thoughtfully and waiting—still unmapped and unknown. We had passed through them, but that was all. And there jutted up others behind that we had not even passed through. They went on and on; they seemed never-ending, eternal.

It was late in the evening and the rain that had fallen all through the day was letting up. Outside the hut a thin sickle moon hung over the Zuwi mountain and reflected its shape as ghostly fire in the pools of water that had gathered in the town. They seemed really to burn and flash out little leaping tongues of flame, for scattered drops of water kept falling into them to shimmer that pale reflection from the sky. But for the sound of splashing drops and a dull, night murmur from the jungle, all was silent. The logs that had sputtered on the floor were now coals, and shot out noiseless little shadows to the dark, smoky ceiling and walls.

"The other five have decided, and now we will go to them," a voice said softly at my shoulder, and I jumped.

I turned and Momo stood behind me. He was dressed in his gown with the gold-and-silver embroidery and his face was very serious.

"We have decided, and ask that you come now,"

he said when I did not speak, and I nodded and followed him from the hut.

What they had decided I knew, or at least I felt I knew, but no word had been spoken between us. Since the killing of the witch elephant and the others after it, there had been talk—low African whispering and nodding of heads—among the big men of the town, and on three occasions strange chiefs had come to see me. They had never said who they were, and the talks we had had together were of nothing of seeming importance. They were, on the surface, merely friendly visits, but beneath the quiet words we exchanged I had felt keen watchfulness on their part and a deep sounding out and examination of me. The chiefs who had come were always spoken of by the men of the town as “they,” but when I asked who the “they” were I got only mumbled evasions. Then that morning the three who had come to see me, together with Kongomah and another strange man, had appeared in Zuwi. They had spent the day with Momo, most of the time in his closed hut, but on several occasions I saw them walking about the town with him. Not once, when they passed my hut, did they speak to me, and always—wherever they went—chief and village man alike bowed and scraped before them in reverent silence. Vahnee knew, as usual, more than he said, but he did tell me, after supper when the boys had gone to their huts, that the men were members of the “Elephant Bush”—the most powerful secret society in all that country.

Then, strangely—for he always stayed in the hut with me, sleeping on his mat in front of the door—he had left the room that night saying he wanted to see that the boys had their loads carefully packed for the trip down. That should have taken him not more than an hour at the most, but he did not return. I had built the fire then and wandered off to other places: places that during the last few weeks I had found myself seeing and thinking of often; wonderful places that now, more than ever, seemed in another world.

"It is in a part of the bush you have never been before," Momo said as we left the town and started up the mountain.

I did not answer, but put my hand on his shoulder, for we had left the trail and turned off into the darkness of the forest on the right. For half an hour we went along in silence; I couldn't help thinking of the last time we had walked that way together. Any moment I expected to hear a leopard! But we heard none, and the rain stopped dripping from the leaves and the moon rose higher into the sky. It was a dead black in the bush, but in places along the climb the trees thinned out, and dull white shadows reached down like shafts of smoky lamplight in a fog. When we came to these I would look up and see the moon and stars; they seemed to be following us, watching. And then we would disappear in the darkness again and they would watch us no more. We went steadily up until we gained the top, and after a pause, in which neither of us spoke, swung off on the other side. The moon watched and the stars peered down through the leaves; earthy-smelling mist hung thick about us and cool ferns wetted our cheeks. There was no sound save our footsteps and the swish of damp bodies on vines. But for these we might have been two dead spirits wandering, lonely, on a midnight jungle peak.

In the valley below a river swung in cutting a high mud bank, and as we neared it I heard the lapping of water and smelled the smoke of fires. Then I saw them—a great half-circle of flame—and standing in the centre the five chiefs who were known as "they." My hand still on Momo's shoulder, we walked up to them. Each bowed low to Momo—he was their chief—and, without words, nodded to me.

Then the ceremony started; it was nearly dawn when it came to an end. Of those magnificent hours I shall not speak. I gave my pledge to silence; from the untainted African I hope I have learned to honour it.

There was no hocus-pocus nor what I had expected there would be; there was no far-fetched belief in wild gods. What they said and did was deep and sincere and beautiful. Their laws were the laws of a people, their thoughts the thoughts of a forest and tribe. They were the word of a country; theirs was the strength that tied it up and made it one, a unit that believed and whose each part lived not alone for himself, but for the greater number.

And so the moon climbed deep into the clouds and then slipped off into the dawn. The stars watched until their eyes grew dim and tired, and the steam kept seeping stilly from the warm, damp earth. And then the sun rose, and I was to come no longer just a white man wandering in the bush. I had been marked and my chest bore the scars of the *Klondah*. No longer were there six who held the fetish. Another had been added, and now there stood seven.

"It, and what I have given Vahnee, are the things that I treasure most," I said to Momo as I put the big elephant gun into his hand. "And much as they mean to me, they are small *dashes* to repay you for all that you have done. When you look on it remember me. I shall always remember you."

It was true; I meant it deeply. Because he knew it and because the gun was the thing that Momo wanted most in all the world, he did not answer for a moment. He held the gun tight with hands that trembled slightly and his eyes caressed it slowly from barrel to stock. Then he smiled; his eyes suddenly filled.

"Thank you," he said simply. "*Um fah sah kumbah, Mahsahgie*. My heart lies down."

He touched the gun to his magic bracelet and to his forehead and heart; he touched it to mine, and turned and disappeared into the dusk of my last evening in Zuwi.

The next morning we started out toward the coast. Saybu and all his warriors and chiefs and people were

there, and they walked along the trail with us until we entered the forest. They had *dashed* us rice for a three-day trip and had given the boys dried chunks of elephant meat and the few green vegetables they could find. It was a pathetic little supply, for the famine was bad; I felt guilty when I knew we must accept it. We had nothing now—no food of our own of any kind, and, worst of all, no salt or sugar. It would only be three days, though, and then we would come to our boxes hidden in the bush below Jenne Mahnah, where we had left them when the boys had deserted us. When we came to them things would look brighter. My mouth watered at the thought of salt! It would give a taste to things again.

Vahnee and I set a good pace, and by noon had come to our old camping place and the scene of the storm. As we neared it the boys grew silent and, as the broken trees with their withered, yellow leaves came into view, they stopped and there was terror in each one's face. The sight of the wrecked camp was not pretty; it had an eerie and revengeful look, and I myself, I must admit, felt a queer back-flash of shivers go down my spine.

There were enough things to worry about without delving into the "witches'" secrets again, though, so I continued on through the clearing as if nothing had happened. A second the boys held back, then suddenly they ran forward to me, each clasping the hand of the one behind him, while Flumo, who was leading them, grabbed mine. Slowly we walked on and forded the stream. They had begun to chant about a witch and a man who had beaten him; they sang to the trees above that they were brave and fearless men—not afraid of anything in all the forest. But they held hands very tightly and their voices seemed not so sure. Flumo did not let go of me until we were at least a mile beyond the place.

When we reached the edge of the swamp there was still an hour of light and so we crossed. This was not pleasant either, but we got through with little trouble

and then continued on for an hour after dark, for none of us wanted to camp near it. There was nothing for supper that night but rice and rank elephant meat. I satisfied myself with rice and water. The meat was a bit too gamy. Then it started to rain and we were too tired to fumble around with shelters, so we just lay down where we were and got wet and very cold. The next morning I felt the effects: a thick head, malaria and, strangely enough, a ravishing hunger. I took more rice, and it had no taste. I ate until my stomach bulged and then five minutes later I was hungry again. It was as though I had put cotton in my stomach. I was half-mad for salt or sugar or something that had taste; I chewed bitter leaves and was violently ill. We started on and I didn't care much about anything. Not even the thought of a good meal when we reached the cache of boxes made my feet lighter. We just dragged on and no one said anything.

Late that night we reached Jenne Mahnah, but we didn't stop, for we wanted to get to the loads. We had torches, and as we swung off the trail at the place where the boys had left us I realized with horror that others must have discovered the cache. A path was beaten down, and there were odds and ends and paper strewn along it. When I saw them I started to run wildly toward the place, and then as I came to it I stopped; my heart seemed to stop with me. The boxes were gone—everything was gone! Only bits of paper and canvas and a tin of kerosene were left. No quinine, no food, nothing; and not a grain of salt!

It took us a week longer to reach the coast. A week of uneventful, hungry, tired trekking. We stopped to see how the old Tahn chief had survived my operation on his leg and found him as chipper as a squirrel with the leg quite healed except for the place where the tube still stuck out. We fixed him up and went on our way with slight thanks from the old ingrate and no food.



The author's canoe-boy and head man of
surfboat with young Gola wife

But we made it, and I shall never forget the anticlimax of our arrival. As I stepped from the canoe, an Assyrian trader whom I knew said casually, "Haven't seen you for a couple of days. Been away?"

Chapter XVIII

It was two nights before I was to sail. Father Dickerson and his wife asked Momo and Vahnee to dine with us. We waited for them on the porch, and as Momo came up the steps, Father Dickerson bowed low and held out his hand, and Momo bowed low and took it.

"My brother has told me all that you did for him. Take this ring, and whenever your eye falls upon your finger and you see it, remember the feeling I have for you in my heart."

He took off his heavy gold ring and handed it to me. I slipped it on Momo's finger, and he bowed low again. He was greatly moved, but, as a proud chief, he did not show his feelings.

"I, too, find speech too shallow to thank with," he answered. "What I did for your brother was but what any country man would do. And what he did for me was what no other man had done before. You and your brother are one."

Then we all sat down at the table on the big piazza that looked down on the blue bay ruffled by its stony bar. The house-boys brought in the food, and we began to eat. There were knives and forks and many strange things that Momo had never seen before. In the back bush only big spoons are known, but the assortment of implements didn't bother him in the least. Calmly he picked up a fork, frowned and turned

it in his hand, then shook his head and pushed it off to the side of the table. Next came his knife and the other spoons and the butter knife; he frowned on each in turn and, with a shake of his head, put them out of the way. There were several large serving spoons near the centre of the table, and when he saw them he smiled. "That's more like it!" his eyes said, and he picked one up.

The dinner went smoothly. Though Momo had probably never sat in a chair before in his life, and surely had never sat at a table, it didn't fluster him a whit. Country men, even the kings, squat around a bowl and reach into it with their hands for what they want, though with some sticky foods a big wooden spoon is used. But to see Momo sitting there eating from a plate on a table, one would have thought he had done it all his life. Nothing flustered him, not even a frozen dessert. He kept the serving spoon for everything—once he had to call a boy back to get it—and he didn't even so much as peek out of the corner of his eye to see how we were tackling the various mysteries.

When we had finished he patted his belly to show that he had enjoyed the food—I was rather in hopes he would favour us with a good bush belch—then followed his host and hostess to chairs at the other end of the piazza, where the usual country custom of each asking the news of the other and of his clan and tribe and forest was gone through. Mrs. Dickerson, when this was finished, got a silver dish of foil-wrapped chocolates which she passed to Momo first. He, thinking the whole thing was a gift to him, nodded his thanks and took it from her hands. An embarrassing moment followed. She said at once to let him keep it, but Vahnee explained and Momo, with great dignity, took one piece and handed it back. When he asked what the "silver lumps" were for I answered, "To eat," and he promptly put his into his mouth and started to chew, foil and all! Another embarrassing moment, but not for Momo. He, just as promptly, spit it out into his hand and tossed it over the railing.

"It is very good," he said with a little smile, "but I think it is tabu in my clan."

He decided, however, that only the silver was, when Vahnee showed him how that particular food was to be attacked!

The next evening the boys had their big banquet. They planned it entirely themselves, and it alone was worth coming seven thousand miles to see. A long low table was built outside a hut of Vahnee's on the mountainside, and when I arrived I found it heaped with every sort of food and fruit the forest or town could supply. Momo and I sat at one end with Vahnee and Flumo at the other. Each boy, in country style, had asked a guest, and at each one's place were gifts: cloth, a pipe, tobacco, even a hat. *Fangha* drummers and other bush entertainers had been called down from the country, and all during the time that we ate they did their tricks and sang their jungle chants.

When the meal was over, just as at banquets in "civilized" countries, speeches were in order—but no yawns! Vahnee was the toastmaster, and a cleverer one I've never heard. He gave a long speech thanking God, and everyone else he could think of, for our safe return, and then there followed a heated discussion as to what language the rest of the speeches should be given in. He had used at least five in giving his! There were Mendi, Buzi, Gizi, Gbandi, Vai, Mandingo, Kru, Bassa and Gola boys present, to say nothing of an American, and so the problem of what language should be used was no small one. Finally they decided on Mendi. "All intelligent men speak Mendi," Vahnee explained.

He called on each boy, and he did it very cleverly. Momo, "The Hunter," was the first to speak, and his talk had to be funny and have something to do with hunting. It did, and was extremely funny. Then Sulemah, "The Fast Walker"; and Geemecie, "First into the Town"; Zo, "The Head-Scratcher"; and Peecie, "The Big Talker." Each was taken for a small ride, and then got up and gave his answering talk.

When each had said his word we settled down to a real bush evening. The entertainers exhausted themselves, and then there followed singing which inevitably ended in a dance. The forest throbbed until the sun rose. My head throbbed much longer than that. It was a great success.

The next morning the boys came and presented me with a cane. They had made it themselves and, aside from the sentiment, it is one of the most beautiful African pieces I have. It is made of ivory with bush-cow horn inlaid and silver worked into a very elaborate pattern, in which each boy is represented by a symbol.

And then the boat came and the last things had to be packed and all of them inspected by the customs officer; from rough blue diamonds to smelly half-cured elephant feet and ears; from delicate carved ivory to lizards in formaldehyde; trunks and trunks, a dizzy-looking pile of crates! Chiefs and men from upcountry had come to ask and say, "*E na na, way?*" and I would answer, "*Uh, dyahmo. M'be na na, way,*" which meant, "Yes, I will come back." Then they would smile and snap fingers with me and we would exchange *dashes*.

Jáh Gangah was down from Kobolya, and he brought a big country gown he had made himself and also a silver ornamented spear from Chief Kahtumu. I accepted them and ran to my room to get the *dashes* I had for them. But when I returned he was gone; he had left one of his men with a message.

"My master says to tell you to return soon. He sends his and his people's greeting to the white chief, your father, and the white head woman, your mother. . . . No, he told me not to take them. He came to bring a *dash*, not to receive one. . . ."

And when the man had gone Momo came to say "*E na na*" to me, too. The elephant gun was over his shoulder, and on the stock and forearm were inlaid silver markings and words in Vai characters, which he had put there since I had given it to him. He looked very handsome, and the boys Vahnee had given him to carry his *dashes* back across the Kongbah forest

looked on their new master with proud, sparkling eyes.

Momo took my hand.

"I, and my people and forests, will be waiting," he said, and then he stopped and lifted the gun from his shoulder. "To take a hunter's gun from him is to take his heart from his chest or his legs and arms from his body," he went on after a little pause.

Then he snapped my fingers, and I snapped his, and he turned and left me. I couldn't understand why he said it, but when Vahnee came an hour later he explained.

"Momo told me to give you this," he said, as he handed me the gun. "He said to tell you you would need it to hunt elephants in your father's bush at home."

Vahnee went on when I didn't speak.

"And this, too, Momo told me to give you. He said it would protect you and bring you safely back to his forests."

And he fastened on my arm Momo's woven elephant-tail bracelet with the small gold bands about it.

As I started into my room I stopped suddenly, shocked. I stood still and none of the boys noticed me. I couldn't believe what I saw them doing. Were they going to steal my things? . . . Were they out of their minds? . . . What was up?

Flumo, Geemecie, Zo, Sulemah and Pendembu were standing over half a dozen trunks and large crates. They were throwing things out right and left and packing them into the smaller trek boxes. They filled one and Flumo lifted it.

"That will be yours, Sulemah," he said, and then started packing another box a little larger.

I watched and my heart sank. I wished they had taken the stuff and got away without my seeing them. After all these months without even a leaf of tobacco stolen, and now that I was leaving—it made my stomach ache and feel hollow.

The second larger box was filled and Flumo lifted it.

"And you can take this one, Zo."

With that he stepped over to the biggest crate in the room and, with a hefty heave, lifted it to his head.

"And this will be mine," he said with a laugh and, spinning round on his bare heel, saw me standing in the doorway.

I expected him to be embarrassed. But not at all; Flumo grinned gaily and swung the crate back to the floor.

"Massah, you've made most of them too heavy," he said, and puffing out his chest added, "too heavy, that is, for everyone but me!"

"What do you mean, Flumo?" I asked.

"Well, after we get to America and start to carry the loads we'll have to pack them all over if we don't do it now. Most of these are two-man loads; you know how hard that is in rough bush!"

"You shouldn't worry about that!" I laughed. "You won't be carrying them."

There was a sickening pause. And then I realized.

"What do you mean, Massah?" Flumo asked in a quaking voice. "Aren't we going with you?"

It seemed an age before I could answer, and when I did I must have made a poor job of it, for all of them had big tears in their eyes and kept shaking their heads as though they could not believe the words they were hearing. They had thought they were all going home with me "to my father's town." America, they had been told, was just where the water ended on the horizon; the boat would take us all there and then, loads on heads, we would trek, chanting, through my father's rice farms and into his big palaver house. The drums would beat and there would be a big feast, and for many nights we would dance. There would be great rejoicing in all my forest.

I tried again to explain to them why I couldn't take them, and the tears slipped from their eyes and ran down their cheeks. Five woolly heads hung down and five pairs of eyes stared blearily at the floor.

"But we would work very hard, Massah," Flumo said, and then he scratched his ear and sniffed.

"Even harder than we have here!" Zo added, and he sniffed, too.

"If there isn't room on the boat we'll paddle your big canoe—if you'll only let us come!" Geemecie mumbled in a pathetic voice.

Then they all said together, "Please let us come with you, *Mahsahgie!*"

I put my head down, too, then. The room had gone all out of focus.

Vahnee and I stood on the rough, grey deck of the steamer. We stood there an hour and said only a few words. Vahnee pushed down a wet little bubble of paint with his toe, then looked off into the mountains to the east. The sun was going down, and hazy, grey mist hung over them. A rich red sky reached up behind.

A tense feeling came into my throat. I lighted a cigarette; the flame wavered over the match. I cleared my throat. It was an awkward, unnatural sound.

"Let's look at my cabin, Vahnee. You've never seen one, have you?"

He didn't answer, but followed me up the steep steps, and we entered the little room.

"Nice, isn't it? Water, light, everything all in one hut!"

He nodded. My laugh had a hollow, silly ring. I poked round the bunk and flashed on the light several times. He looked out the porthole. His face and eyes were very quiet. I turned on the water and filled a glass.

"Drink?"

He took the glass and tasted the water.

"It is not boiled, Massah! I taste no smoke," he said, his voice startled.

"This doesn't have to be. It's different water," I answered.

"It all comes from the sky." His lip trembled a little. "Oh, Massah, be careful, please! Just because you are away, don't——"

He stopped short and stared out the window again. The lights at the mission were on. They twinkled through the fast-thickening dusk. Fires were being lighted along the shore, and a faint smell of wood smoke drifted out on a land-stirred breeze. Waves lapped restlessly against the metal sides of the boat.

"Nice little room, isn't it?" I ventured again, then swallowed.

We walked out of the room, down the ladder and on to the deck again. Faint voices came out from the shore. The Kru men were gathering for a night of fishing by moonlight. The sky had turned deep purple. Fires were springing up all along the shore, and between the mud huts of the Kru village. A drum sounded, then another and another.

"Big dance tonight, I guess. Fine moon for it."

Vahnee nodded. Then suddenly he looked into my face and took my hand. His blue cloth slipped back off his arm and on to his shoulder.

"*E na na, way, Mahsahgie*," he said slowly. "Come back!"

"*M'bay na na, way, dyahmo* (friend)," I answered, but I could not trust my voice for more words.

He lifted his arm, and in a broad, graceful sweep took in the mountain and the lowlands, the high country back toward Kongbah.

"*E na na, way*," he said again, and then he smiled. "We will all be waiting, Massah."

He snapped my fingers four times slowly, then turned and went down the ladder into his waiting canoe. The motors churned and the ship began to vibrate. The canoe pushed off and Vahnee held his hand up once again.

The paddles rose and fell. A small figure standing, arm raised and cloth flowing off in toga folds, disappeared in the gloom of near night. The ship groaned and swung about slowly. A deck hand walked to my side; he tapped me on the shoulder.

"The little fellow told me to give you this for your mother," he said. "Said something about it belonging

to his father, a king up in Mendi country. His father gave it to him when he was born, or something like that."

He handed me a delicate gold necklace. A gold medallion hung from it, and as I looked I saw the star and feather marks of the Mendi rulers.

I turned back to the rail and stared into the gathering darkness, but the canoe was out of sight, lost to my eyes in the welter of surf at the bar. There was so much I would have liked to say—so much that I never could say.

"*Isseh! Isseh!*" I whispered into the dark. "*Um fah sah kumbah.* My heart lies down."

The deck was throbbing under my feet in a steady soothing rhythm now, and the orderly sounds of a ship at sea rose about me as she gathered speed.

